Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كليّة اللاهوت المعمدانيّة العربيّة

October 2024 | www.abtslebanon.org

Hardships and crises are familiar territory for us at ABTS. Since our founding in Lebanon in 1960, we have witnessed more than our share of conflict and turmoil. ABTS's history is interwoven with the struggles of a region in crisis. Yet through it all, we have seen God's hand at work, and His mercy shining through even the darkest moments.

The conclusion of the 2023-2024 academic year filled us with hope. Final preparations were underway for the Middle East Consultation, and we were set to celebrate the graduation of 34 students. Likewise, the start of the 2024-2025 academic year was promising. Alongside our returning students, we eagerly anticipated welcoming 20 new students from Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Syria for an in-person residency on our campus. However, none of this unfolded as planned. The escalation of the war forced the postponement of the in-person events and the repurposing of our facilities to become a shelter for those fleeing more dangerous areas. Despite the ugliness of war, we see this moment as another opportunity to reflect God's love and goodness in the face of adversity.

Programs Update:

Historically, during times of crisis—be it war, the pandemic, or the Beirut explosion—our educational programs would pause as we shift our focus to relief efforts. But this time things are different. While we are fully engaged in offering shelter to those in need, our online academic programs continue with minimal interruption. The academic year began with 224 students from 19 different nationalities, all answering God's call to be equipped for ministry.

Our Academic dean, Walid Zailaa, who has spearheaded the resilience and adaptability of our programs during crises, shared his thoughts:

Despite the ongoing conflict in Lebanon, ABTS's theology programs are continuing at full capacity. Throughout this challenging season, I've felt the undeniable presence of God, actively preparing us for this moment. Our innovative online and hybrid formats of the Bachelor of Theology and Master degrees in Biblical and Theological Studies and in Middle Eastern Studies have enabled us to proceed as scheduled. This adaptability reflects not only our commitment to maintaining educational excellence but also our collective faith in God's provision during difficult times. While my heart aches for those affected by the conflict, I am filled with hope and anticipation for a successful academic year. I pray for the swift end of the war so that all those displaced may return home safely.

Kees van der Knijff, our Graduate Programs Lead, was forced to evacuate with his family but continues supporting our programs from abroad. He shared:

> *Although the beginning of the academic year has been severely disrupted, our students' determination to continue their studies under difficult circumstances inspires me. Their perseverance encourages me to give my best in supporting them remotely.*

The situation in Lebanon is scary, but as God gives us the ability, we continue serving His church by training and equipping leaders who serve in Lebanon as well as in other difficult places.

New hoped for dates

Shelter Update:

At ABTS, most of our staff are here not for the paycheck, but because of God's call and their obedience to His voice. They truly embody Colossians 3:23, which urges us to work with all our hearts, as for the Lord. One such person is Rana Wazir, who, while serving as Registrar and Director of Quality Assurance, also manages our guesthouse. Together with her dedicated team, they have been selflessly serving more than 200 guests—many of them children—who have fled the southern regions of Lebanon, Beirut suburbs, and the Bekaa area in search of safety.

Rana Semaan and Rana Wazir toiling together

Day and night, the team ensures that families are welcomed into a hospitable and safe environment.

We opened our guesthouse at the start of the recent conflict in October 2023, initially receiving one church family from the south. A few rooms were occupied at first, but as the conflict intensified, our guesthouse and academic residence quickly filled. By the first week of October 2024, all 53 units were occupied. Our kitchen staff work tirelessly to provide three meals a day, while our guesthouse team ensures that each family feels at home in a clean, safe, and secure space.

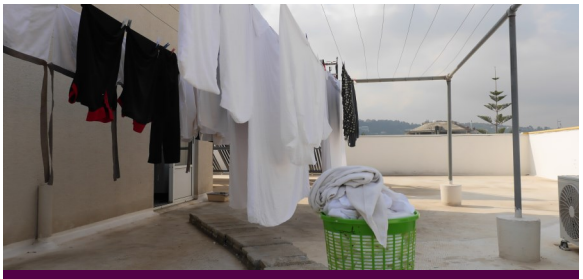
Meals preparation

Beyond providing for physical needs, we are also addressing the spiritual and emotional well-being of our guests. Our daily staff chapel has been transformed into a community chapel, welcoming all guests for worship and the sharing of God's Word. Our non-formal training team has launched a youth training workshop, and our sister ministry, Salt & Light, is running a daily program for children. Additionally, our library remains open to those who need a place to study or work.

Youth training workshop

Although our capacity is limited, and hundreds of thousands have been displaced across Lebanon, our hope is that each person who passes through ABTS encounters the infinite and unconditional love of Christ, the love we have experienced through His sacrifice on the cross.

Beirut bombing as seen from ABTS



Guest laundry

Reflecting on the ongoing efforts, our Guesthouse Manager, Krysten Mansour, shared:

> *I speak for many of our staff in the kitchen and the guesthouse when I say that it has been deeply encouraging to live out the Christian values we've learned and embraced at ABTS. In these challenging times, we have been given the opportunity to put our faith into practice by serving the community. Although we all have our own families and personal struggles, we willingly spend long, exhausting hours serving others, knowing that this reflects the spirit of ABTS as a family.*

We don't know what the coming days, weeks, or months will bring. But we are confident that God is sovereign, and He has called us to be agents of hope in this seemingly hopeless situation. May His power be made perfect in our weakness.

Packing meals

Kids' crafts

For regular updates on our response:

https://abtslebanon.org/war2024

Help us sustain our efforts

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Our latest blog posts:

Can We Still Believe In Peace?

Why We Study Theology

Pray with Us!

Krysten | Moore Conference Center and Guesthouse Manager
Please pray for our families and loved ones. Pray for my fiancée and me as our wedding is in May. Pray that God removes the stress and worry we are facing due to the current situation in Lebanon. Pray for wisdom and calmness during this time.

Rana W. | Registrar and Director of Quality Assurance / Director of Moore Conference Center and Guesthouse
Please pray for the children affected by the recent conflict in Lebanon, that they may experience peace and healing for their emotional well-being. Also, lift up the Guesthouse staff at ABTS in prayer, may they remain aware of the special impact of their service, knowing that their efforts are not in vain.

Manar | Housekeeper
The Lebanese people are heartbroken, especially those who have lost their homes. Pray that God would comfort them, give them peace, and heal their hearts. Also, pray that Jesus strengthens us to continue our work in service of His name, supporting families and individuals more and more each day.

Habib | Front Desk Representative
Please pray for my work in serving others. Pray that God brings peace to His people and that the war in Lebanon comes to an end. May His light shine upon us each morning, ushering in a new and bright day. Additionally, pray that He grants us the strength to faithfully serve Him.

Rana S. | Moore Conference Center and Guesthouse Assistant Manager
Please pray that we find the balance between work and home. Pray that God grants us strength to overcome tiredness and stress. May we serve with love and kindness, ensuring that our stress does not affect our families.

Emile | Preparation Cook
Please pray for strength for the Lebanese people after all that has been happening. Pray that the Love of Jesus Christ shines through us. Also, please pray for my safety as I will be traveling soon.

Beni | Kitchen Steward
Please pray for my work in Lebanon and for my papers. Also, pray that my Arabic accent improves, and that I gain a better understanding of the language.

Lebanon

May we see God's hand in these challenging times that Lebanon is facing. Pray that God makes a way for those who fled their homes to return and for the war to end. Pray for those who have lost their homes and everything they have worked for over the years. May they find hope and encouragement in the One who left His throne for them. Pray for the Church in Lebanon to shine during this difficult period with acts of love and service, pointing to Christ who exemplified compassion for the weak and the heartbroken.