Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كليّة اللاهوت المعمدانيّة العربيّة

October 2025 | www.abtslebanon.org

On September 28, 2025, ABTS board, faculty, staff, students, friends, and partners gathered to witness and celebrate the "Passing the Baton" event, marking the transition of leadership to a new steward. For the past 20 years, Elie Haddad remained faithful, serving God first, overseeing and growing what He had placed in his care. Even in his final words as president, he reminded us that every achievement during his tenure was by God's grace, not his own strength. He also acknowledged that the dedicated efforts of the entire ABTS team have shaped the seminary into what it is today.

The ceremony began with a word of welcome from Riad Kassis, the Board Chair, followed by worship, Scripture reading, and prayer. Several speakers at the event, including board members and partners, reflected the significant milestones accomplished during Elie's leadership.

Elie then shared his personal reflection, after which Wissam was introduced, presented his vision, and was prayed over.

Elie Haddad

In his word, Elie highlighted a guiding principle that sustained him: "Leadership is not ownership; it's stewardship." Way back in his first days at ABTS, Paul Sanders, former ABTS provost, had advised him to start thinking about succession, a piece of wisdom he has now passed on to Wissam. Elie emphasized that the ABTS presidency was not about his own legacy but about honoring God alone.

Wissam Nasrallah

As he begins his new role as president, Wissam Nasrallah holds firmly to Psalm 127:1: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." He explained that this verse reminds him that all human efforts, including our degrees, strategies, and innovations are meaningless if Christ is not the cornerstone. One day, each of us will give account to God for what He has entrusted to us as His stewards. For this reason, we labor not for our own glory, but for His alone.

Wissam also shared his vision for ABTS in this new season: "*In partnership with the local church, our call is to form a generation of worshipers, grounded in Scripture, critical thinkers and lifelong learners, and servant leaders, who reflect Christ Himself*." He

emphasized that true theological formation begins with joy in the knowledge of God, which kindles love and affection. This formation must remain firmly rooted in Scripture, a foundation that does not silence questions but gives those who seek the truth, direction that does not erase fear and doubt but points to the unchanging character of God.

This transition is neither the end of one story nor the beginning of another, but the continuation of God's work through ABTS. A work that He Himself has started and will continue, all for His glory. May God bless Wissam in this new role, direct his every step, and keep his eyes fixed on Him as he navigates this new journey, with its storms and gentle waves.

Graduating for His Glory

This year, ABTS celebrated the graduation of 32 students from various Arab countries, marking the highest number of graduates in the seminary's history. We rejoiced as each student stepped forward to receive the fruit of what they had diligently sown.

The night before graduation, students, staff and faculty gathered for a special evening to hear testimonies and enjoy a time of fellowship. It was a privilege to witness God's transformative work in the students' lives. Many shared how studying at ABTS shaped their character, strengthened their faith, and provided a supportive and welcoming environment throughout their academic journey.

Tonina, a Certificate in Ministry graduate, reflected:

> *Each course and instructor challenged me, always pushing me out of my comfort zone and encouraging my growth. Despite the difficulties I faced at church and the moments when I considered quitting, the tutors consistently supported me. I felt that I could reach out to any instructor for guidance, even if they were not directly teaching me. I have not encountered the same sense of closeness elsewhere. ABTS is truly unique. I also appreciate its holistic approach, encompassing not just one denomination but all of Christianity.*

During the ceremony, our graduates were reminded of their role in the Kingdom of God. Former ABTS president, Elie Haddad, reflected on the importance of equipping men and women during times like these, noting that as the Church grows, there is an ever-increasing need for committed leaders and strong seminaries. Riad Kassis, ABTS Board Chair, encouraged graduates: "You are the only Bible some people will ever read." This reminder challenged each graduate to live out Christ's teachings and reflect His image in every aspect of life.

Anne Zaki

The keynote speaker, Anne Zaki, emphasized that every believer has a unique calling. Drawing inspiration from the story of King Josiah, his mother Jedidah, and prophetess Huldah, she encouraged students to be ready, shaped by Christ and His word, to be used by God at the right time, all for His glory.

Walid and Elia

Additionally, during the event Walid Zailaa, Academic Dean, presented the Ghassan Khalaf Award for the best article, titled "A Call to Practice Biblical Lament in Worship", to Elia Shehata, an MTh student and lead of the Certificate in Ministry program at ABTS.

Graduation is a milestone, but not an end. It marks the beginning of a lifelong journey of learning and service. The ceremony concluded with a moving worship song, "*Ain't Got Time to Die*". As the song reminds us, may our graduates continue to "keep so busy working for the Kingdom".

Residing in His Presence

When Online Learners Become a Community

Our Bachelor of Theology (BTh) program is a blended program that requires students to attend a two-week residency at least twice during their five years of study. This year, many BTh students from different countries attended the residency, united in rejoicing in the Lord and growing affectively, cognitively, and behaviorally. The aim of the residency is to foster connection and nurture both spiritual and intellectual growth as students spend time learning together in community.

Chapel during residency

On the first morning of residency, the chapel was filled with voices from the Arab world, different accents, different stories, one mission: to be shaped in the image of Jesus to serve the Church. The president and faculty led brief daily devotions designed to encourage the students, covering topics such as the true meaning of being God's adopted children, unshakeable hope amid pain, and God's grace and mercy that pursue us. Students also shared heartfelt testimonies in turn, describing how God has called them and worked in their lives, creating powerful moments of witness. Maher, a fourth-year student from Syria, reflected: "I learned that seminaries don't build leaders, they support them." Rabha, a first-year student from Sudan, shared: "Without God's love, we wouldn't all be gathered here, coming from different places. At ABTS, I felt truly part of the family of Christ. Everyone was welcoming and loving, accepting me just as I am." What began as an online concert quickly felt like family as students prayed, learned, cried, and laughed side by side.

During the residency, core and visiting faculty members lead courses covering a wide range of topics for our students. The following is a brief overview of some of the covered topics.

Perry Shaw in class

Perry Shaw, delivered an enriching session to the students about the *Hidden Curriculum* and institutional vision, mission, and values. He emphasized that "real theology is what we do, not what we say", highlighting the importance of tacit theology; how our actions often declare our faith more powerfully than words. Reflecting on the residency, he said: "I was inspired by the students' eagerness to engage in conversation and connect with one another. At one point, I even had to stop them! This program truly fulfills the vision of accessible online learning that is grounded in meaningful physical connection during residency."

Parush Parushev taught the *Gospel of John* course and focused on the Gospel's witness-centered message; how living testimonies serve as witnesses for people to believe. Carlos, a fifth-year student

serving in Lebanon, shared:

Parush Parushev in class

Dr. Parush's style is unique. He explains the Gospel while sharing about his life. His personal examples helped us understand theology more deeply. This course changed how I view the stories of the Bible. I now see that they are part of one greater story: the story of redemption. To understand the beginning, you must go to the middle. To understand the middle, you must go back to the beginning.

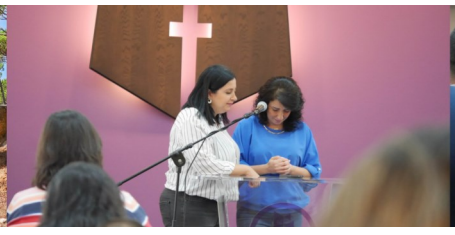
David Baer in class

David Baer taught the *Book of Isaiah* course. Frequently quoted in the New Testament, Isaiah is essential for understanding God's purpose for all nations. This course aimed not only to equip students to share the message of Isaiah but also to help them develop a deep, substantive theology rather than superficial understanding. Given that one week is not sufficient to cover the entire book, the course focused on teaching the students strategies to study and analyze the text independently, mainly through workshops. David shared: "I'm very pleased with how students interacted. They're a very mature group who love to learn and laugh. We were learning a lot together and laughing a lot together. I really appreciated this combination."

George Sleiman, Head Librarian, taught the *Research Methodology* course for first year students, emphasizing metacognition and self-learning. The goal was to equip students to synthesize knowledge and create insights that will benefit the Church. George also helped organize a spiritual day during the residency, which focused on healing, facing pain, and listening to God's voice amid life's noise. He shared: "This day was special because it was deeply personal for both students and facilitators. Vulnerabilities were shared, pains discussed, and healing was prayed for."

During the spiritual day

Our BTh program is hybrid by design, but residency is where relationships take root, where networks are formed, and where theology moves from screen to life. The residency remains a vital part of the students' academic and spiritual journey, providing an invaluable space for them to connect, listen, and experience the communal dimension of theological formation. Until we have the joy of meeting students again, either during next year's residency, or in their home countries, we will deeply miss having them on campus. Our prayer is that, as one student shared, "may we serve others in humility, just as we were served on campus."



Our latest blog posts:

A Call to Practice Biblical Lament in Worship

From Theory to Practice: Reflections on the Middle East Consultation 2025

Pray with Us!
Prayers from our BTh Students

Fidan | Syrian
Please pray for peace to prevail within the Kurdish community and for many to come to the saving knowledge of Christ. Pray also that God would bless and guide the vision He has placed on my heart, enabling me to faithfully proclaim the Gospel among the Kurdish people.

Philip | Lebanese
Please pray that God grants me wisdom to listen with compassion and share the Gospel in a way that honors Him. Also, pray for peace to prevail across the region, and for the mothers of the Middle East, that they may find rest and comfort in the midst of their grief.

Malko | Syrian
Please pray for the church where I serve, that God would strengthen and sustain it through every challenge it may face. Pray for my country, Syria, that its people may come to know the Lord and live for His glory. Pray for those who persecute Christians, that, like Paul, they may experience repentance and transformation. Ask God to bless my ministry, grant me wisdom and use me for His glory in the right place and at the right time. Finally, pray for peace of mind as I face the daily challenges in my life.

Sabri | Tunisian
Please pray that God grants me wisdom and guidance through His Holy Spirit as I share the Gospel in my region. Kindly pray for good news ministries planned for the end of October, that God may bless and direct them. Also, please pray for my mother and sister, that they may come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Oussama | Moroccan
Please pray for my ministry, that God may use it to touch the hearts of non-believers, especially in Marrakech. Pray for guidance, wisdom, and protection for my family, and for the church in Morocco.

ABTS
Please pray for ABTS as it entered a new season after the transition. May God bless Elie in this new chapter of his life and ministry. Pray also that God would grant Wissam wisdom and strength to lead with faith and courage amid challenges and uncertainties. Lift the ABTS leadership team in your prayers, that they may remain faithful to God's calling and attentive to His voice. May this new season under Wissam's leadership be marked by fruitfulness, grace, and divine guidance.