

December 2020

Greetings from Lebanon

2020 has been quite the disorienting year globally, but even more so in Lebanon. When the pandemic hit early this year, Lebanon was already reeling from an economic crisis and a political uprising. People were already hurting as a result of the hyperinflation and the loss of purchasing power experienced by all Lebanese. The lockdowns because of the pandemic added more stress to an already broken infrastructure. Then on August 4, 2020, a big explosion hit the port of Beirut destroying a good portion of the city and causing devastation of a scale that has not been experienced before.

In the midst of all of this, the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) continues to serve God, despite the many challenges and obstacles. As we went through one crisis after another, we had two types of responses at ABTS, an emergency response and a strategic response.

ABTS Emergency Response

No different than any other educational institution around the globe, ABTS had to respond to the lockdowns and closures caused by the pandemic. By mid-March, we had to close our classrooms and send our students back to their home countries. We were able to benefit from our years of investment in the online program to complete the academic year remotely.



Not only our classrooms were affected, but we also switched all our programs and initiatives to some form of an online platform. Even our Middle East Consultation that we usually hold at ABTS in June, we replaced that with a series of monthly webinars lending Middle Eastern voices to the global discourse on urgent matters of faith and witness. You can read all about these webinars and watch them [here](#).

One of the effects of the pandemic is that the ABTS guest-house and dormitory facilities became empty. No conferences were being hosted and no students on campus. This has opened up the way to another emergency response. Since April, ABTS has hosted hundreds of first responders who were caring for COVID-19 patients. And after the August explosion, ABTS was immediately able to host families that suddenly became homeless. The work with these families became a significant ministry. Unsolicited, partners from all over the world sent ABTS monetary support to help the families. This included CBM church partners as well. With all of that support, ABTS was able to care for the families on campus as well as help them repair their homes or get settled in new homes. It was a true blessing to be able to bring hope and healing at a time of deep suffering and despair.

ABTS Strategic Response

The big question facing institutions like ABTS is: What happens after the pandemic, will life go back to normal? It would be unfortunate not to think strategically at a time of great disorientation like this. As the saying goes, “don’t waste a good crisis”. This is precisely what happened at ABTS. The leadership went through a period of intense reflection, trying to discern what God is calling ABTS to do going forward. What does the future of theological education and leadership formation look like in the MENA region? Is a residential



Faculty redesigning the curriculum

program still the ideal method of meeting the training needs of the Church in the region? These are the questions that ABTS leadership grappled with. The answer was to move from a fully residential program to a hybrid program that gives a lot more flexibility for training and increases accessibility for

leaders who are so immersed in ministry that they cannot leave for 3 years to be trained in Beirut. There is a lot to consider when moving from a monastic model of training to more of an apprenticeship model. Figuring out the best way to provide the formative elements and the informal components of the curriculum is challenging. ABTS faculty members are still busy exploring these areas of the curriculum in depth. With all these changes, ABTS is going through a restructure of its operation to be well positioned to service the new offerings. This has been quite a journey for ABTS, and it is still not finished. You can follow ABTS's journey of change [here](#).

ABTS 60th Anniversary



Last month we celebrated ABTS's 60th anniversary. ABTS has evolved significantly during the past 60 years, building on its strong heritage yet expanding to serve a growing Church in a drastically changing region. The celebration event was streamed live as ABTS faculty took the time to explain the core of our curriculum and how each component prepares the Church for a more effective prophetic voice. You can watch the celebration [here](#).

Mireille's Ministry

Mireille has concluded her years of ministry with Heart for Lebanon, most recently writing 48 lessons of discipleship material that are utilized in the ministry with the Syrian refugees.

Mireille has started a new chapter of ministry, volunteering with ABTS in tutoring online courses in the Certificate in Ministry program.



Mireille is excited about this new ministry as she gets to invest her time with ministry leaders from all over the Arab world.

CBM Ministry in the Region

CBM's work in the MENA (Middle East – North Africa) region continues. Not much travel was possible this pandemic year. However, CBM's involvement through ABTS graduates is growing every year. You can read more about this work in Joe Bridi's [ministry updates](#).

Partner with CBM

We want to take this opportunity to thank you for your ongoing prayer, encouragement and support. Thank you for taking part in what God is doing in our region.

If you wish to become a partner with our ministry, with the MENA ministry, or with any other CBM ministry, please contact Barb Keys bkeys@cbmin.org for more information. Your partnership is key for the sustainability and growth of the ministry.

Stay Connected

We would love to hear from you. You can email us at:

Elie – ehaddad@cbmin.org

Mireille – mhaddad@cbmin.org

This Christmas shines yet brighter
Than all the ones before.
Though darkness seems quite darker,
The Light will stand out more.

May we then not abandon them
Who dwell in grey remains.
May we not just be passersby;
Shrug at the scene unchanged!

Our hearts ablaze with passion for
The lost, the poor, the lame.
This Christmas, we remember
That it's for such He came.

Poem by Teresa Sfeir, ABTS Communication Officer



Merry Christmas from ABTS - Isaiah 9:6