



Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

www.abtslebanon.org

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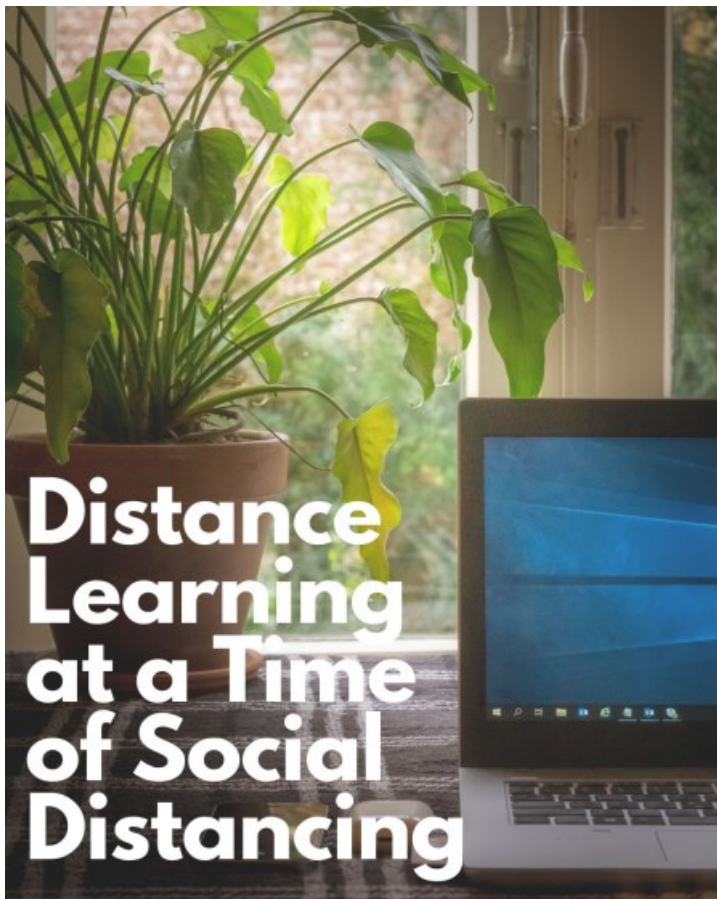
The Lord is risen!

Easter is so much more meaningful to us this year, as we have been experiencing the resurrected life in fresh new ways. Amidst anxiety and uncertainty, we are finding rest in God's promises; amidst grief and pain, the joy of the Lord is our strength; amidst hopelessness and despair, our hope remains in a living and loving God. It is through the resurrected Christ that life prevails over death, and thus, we can live in the power of the resurrected life today.

This intense paradoxical life with God did not start for us with the coronavirus crisis. We have been at a time of disorientation since the Lebanese uprising last October. It started with political upheaval, combined with social distress and a crumbling economy, and now, it has culminated in a pandemic with all its ramifications. Yet, through every roadblock that we face and every challenge that we encounter, God is providing for all our needs and is illuminating our path one step at a time.

The world will face new unprecedented challenges post coronavirus, and the role of the Church in proclaiming His love to the world will be all the more important. Our task today is to discover how we can align the ministry of ABTS with God's vision for the Church and be His instrument for the next chapter. Our challenges are far from over. Nevertheless, we will continue to put our complete trust in Him. Our prayer for us as it is for you, dear friends and partners, is that we remain faithful, bold, and creative as God prepares us for a new phase of ministry.

Elie Haddad, President



Halls have never been emptier. Streets have never been quieter. Who imagined that we would one day behold such a global sight? This sudden stillness is unsettling to many, and uncertainty seems to hover everywhere. Yet, this is not the time to shrink back in fear wishing for the trial to go away, but, in the words of Tolkien, we have to decide "what to do with the time that is given us". Now, more than ever, we are called to live in such a way that others see our works and glorify our Father in heaven.

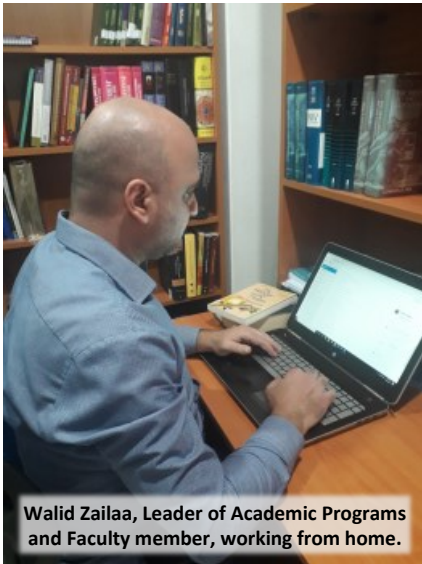
For decades, God has been using us to train Arab Church leaders for effective service. Never once had He left us to do the work alone, for the work was never ours to start. Time and again, He proved that He provides the resources to carry out the work to which He has called us – enough for every day's work – as we learn to trust in Him. As we do our part, we regularly hear reports of our graduates' ministries across the region and praise the God we serve. However, this is a first for us – that the lively noise in our halls and classes is suddenly hushed. It certainly is not a surprise to Him.

Our residential students come from various Arab countries. They share a busy life together on campus as part of the larger ABTS community. Their presence here allows for a concentrated

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Walid Zailaa, Leader of Academic Programs and Faculty member, working from home.

formational experience as they become family to us, and we become family to them; and then, we part at graduation. Many Arab ministry workers, however, do not have the freedom of putting the ministry on hold to receive training in Lebanon. Therefore, to increase our impact and reach potential leaders who are unable to study in the residential

academic year online. They are currently taking courses and non-formal components including theological reflections over a period of 12 weeks. At the same time, prior to the start of every week, each faculty member reviews the online unit he/she is teaching. This becomes part of a review plan for the online program, which is a tremendously significant step, as we plan to launch the whole Bachelor of Theology program online.

This transition certainly hasn't been easy for our students, but they are grateful to resume their training in such circumstances. Those who could not return home remain confined to their dorm rooms after having gotten used to the busy community life on campus and in their individual ministries. The abrupt shift hasn't been easy for those who made it home as well. They have had to resettle once more and to alter their lifestyles. In all this, they have been hopeful, looking unto God who is in control.

A third-year student from Egypt shares that his trip back home was smooth. He is in quarantine with his family as he resumes his online ministry.

I am ready and excited to resume my studies online and to take my remaining credits. We have already learned the basics of online learning, and our module courses have begun. This is my final year. Of course, I would have preferred closure rather than an abrupt goodbye to the people on campus, but truly, the seminary made the right decision in sending us back home. I am currently confined to my house; the upside is I have more time to study.

A second-year student from Morocco is currently on campus with his wife because airports shut down before they could fly home. He says,

Online education is perfect for such times. The courses allow for discussion and interaction, which



Rafed and Hiba, couple from Syria, third-year residential students, studying online from ABTS dorms.

program, we launched the Certificate in Ministry online program in 2015, which is comparable to our one-year Certificate in Theology program and which was recently accredited by the European Council for Theological Education (ECTE). We have 95 registered online students for this term.

We are thankful for the possibility of online theological education, especially now, as we go through a period of physical distancing. We are thankful that God is walking us through as we are working towards a full distance learning online program, which allows online students to go for a two-year or a three-year degree. Because of this, we are now able to move our residential students' education online for the balance of this academic year. In turn, this will accelerate the launch of a complete Bachelor of Theology through the distance-learning program.

"COVID-19 has accelerated the process, not more," Walid Zailaa, Assistant Professor of Old Testament, Leader of Academic Programs and Head Librarian, shares,

Because we believe in the local church, ABTS has been training faithful men and women in theological education for effective service in the Arab world. Our next move is to launch the full Bachelor of Theology distance-learning online program by 2021. The current crisis has forced us in that direction earlier than expected. Faculty will be teaching our residential students online using the platform we have been developing. It is, indeed, a great privilege to work with ABTS faculty who are one step ahead of the crisis.

On April 8, our residential students officially resumed their

in turn, allows us to benefit from one another's experiences. Things are not exactly easy for us as we face lockdown away from our loved ones. At the same time, God is broadening our perspective as we try to serve Him online.

We praise God for allowing our residential students to meet again as a community through the online platforms. We pray that both, our students and our faculty members, cope well with this migration! We know God has already been preparing us for today, and He will certainly teach us to do things differently as we continue to partake in His mission. The work is plentiful in the region, even more so now. As the world comes out of this pandemic, it will be facing challenges of a new order. This makes the role of our churches, and consequently the leaders we are training, even more crucial.



Second-year residential students from Sudan studying online from ABTS dorms.



They Make the Valley of Tears a Place of Springs

Mike Kuhn shares about God's work through the Sudanese Church

The Church in Sudan is not wasting time. They venture to unreached areas with the gospel. They distribute Bibles. They actively seek to further the Kingdom. They did not cower when religious freedom was limited. Outnumbered yet not outfought, the ripples of their faith continue to widen in the country.

From March 7 to 13, Mike Kuhn visited Sudan and met several of our graduates. Mike and his wife Stephanie left to the States in 2018 after having served with us for six years. During his time in Lebanon, Mike had served as an Assistant Professor in Discipleship and Biblical Theology at ABTS and now he continues to be part of our adjunct faculty.

Could you share with us about your current ministry?

Even when I was at ABTS, I was with a mission called World Outreach, and part of that is the International Theological Education Network (ITEN). Since leaving Lebanon and coming back to the US, I have continued working with ITEN. This group partners with indigenous training movements. Sometimes they are academic movements; sometimes they are church based. We are trying to partner in effective ways with leadership development for churches that are working among the least reached people. That is why I went to Sudan.

How was your trip to Sudan, and what did you do there?

This was my first time to Sudan, so the people there helped me understand the situation better. They were so kind to welcome me as their guest. The fact that I speak Arabic and the fact that I have a background of many years in Egypt and North Africa helped a lot. Talal [ABTS graduate] was my guide and my host. He helped me and my colleague meet the different leaders in Sudan.

While we were there, we met with several training movements and seminaries including a wonderful visionary group called Faith Institute, who train people from different denominations. The Church in Sudan gives me much hope. It is very active despite the political developments and the economic situation.



Mike Kuhn with two of our graduates



Mike with Fouad, our graduate, and his wife

How did you see the fruit of theological training in the Sudanese leaders you once taught?

I saw some of my former students and other ABTS graduates I had never taught like Pastor Hafez Fessaha of Bahri Evangelical church. ABTS should really feel gratified because many ABTS graduates are scattered throughout Sudan.

These people are ministering in diverse ways. Habil, for instance, is ministering in the Anglican Church. He's involved in pastoral leadership and training. Fouad is an Evangelist in his church and remains active in leading worship. Sam is hoping to serve in the Nuba Mountains. Makki is waiting for the Lord's open door, but while he waits, he's involved in the local church. Hanna and Nabila continue to teach and disciple actively. ABTS is really fulfilling its vision, and these Sudanese are ministering in the churches very humbly. They are taking leadership roles in their local churches and enriching the ministry there. I was extremely proud of ABTS and grateful that I had those years teaching there – and that I remain associated with ABTS.

Talal asked us to share with his discipleship group. He takes 25 different students through intensive discipleship. He doesn't do all the teaching; he has different pastors and leaders teaching on different topics. What I saw there in Talal was the value of shared leadership, the value of academic excellence, the value of interdenominational ministry, and the value of discipleship and forming leaders.

What are some of the most exciting things about God's work in Sudan?

Sudan is in a three-year transition to democratic elections. Of course, during the former regime, the church suffered in different ways. Much of the church property was taken – not just by the regime, but the instability in the country proliferated land disputes.

The faithfulness of the Church, though they are a tiny minority, encouraged me most. These Christians are building their ministries and reaching out with the gospel. I heard many stories of non-Christians coming to Christ through them. They were an example to me. I think they can be an example to Christians in America and in Lebanon.

I heard there is fruitful ministry in Darfur, a part of Sudan that suffered during recent conflicts. As Christians serve them, they begin to understand that Jesus came to set the captive free. The Church has a great potential to be a light – a source of human rights and equality in Sudan. I think it's a moment of hope for Darfur, and a moment of hope for Sudan.

Do you have prayers or hopes for the ministry in Sudan?

What the Sudan Church needs is trained leaders who are not just academic leaders but also ministry leaders. Their heart is in ministry. I think ABTS is uniquely positioned to do that because of all those Sudanese graduates. My prayer is that Lebanon and ABTS will continue and even be a greater blessing to Sudan.

We praise God that we had the opportunity to equip and to learn from these Sudanese church leaders. We are humbled at how an Unlimited God uses limited people to accomplish His great work. We pray that our Sudanese students continue to be salt and light to their communities.



A group photo of several ABTS graduates with Mike



MOORE
conference center

We have been exploring ways to serve the community through our guesthouse amid this pandemic. We found an effective way to meet a growing need. Through the volunteer group **Baytna Baytak**, we are offering free accommodation to healthcare workers (doctors, nurses, red cross and emergency service teams, ...) who are at the frontline of this coronavirus battle and who do not want to go back to their homes because they live with vulnerable family members. This will be our way of supporting these heroes as they care for patients daily. We currently have 18 health workers in the building, and more are checking in every day. Let us also support them through prayer! **For COVID-19/ABTS updates, click here.**



Pray with Us: Prayer Requests from First-Year Students

Youstina | Egypt

Please pray for my transformation process while studying theology. I do not wish to finish the same way I started so I can glorify God among my people. Pray that God gives me wisdom to manage my time well as I study online from home while reflecting Christ to others even when things are stressful.

Haroun | Sudan

Pray for my teaching ministry within my local church in Sudan. Pray that God grants me wisdom and grace to humbly share with the leaders of my local church what I learned here.

Ibrahim | Sudan

I ask you to pray that the voice of the Church in Sudan is heard more with the rule of the new transitional government. Pray that the Church remains a light in spite of the challenges.

Balgis | Sudan

Pray for my health and for my ex-husband who hasn't yet come to Christ.

Noha | Sudan

I ask you to pray that I heed the leading of the Holy Spirit when I make decisions. Every day is full of decisions! Coming to seminary in Lebanon was the best decision I made. I never look back in regret because I know God wants me to be here.

Sleiman | Sudan

Pray that God uses me greatly in Sudan and that my relationship with God grows with each day.

Fathia | Sudan

Pray for us students as we remain here on campus, and pray for my family's safety in Sudan during the pandemic. I ask you to pray that God uses me to share the Good News of Christ with my mother, and that the Lord changes her heart. Moreover, my younger sister has an acute knee pain and inflammation that is affecting every aspect of her life, but I praise God that she is getting better. Please pray for her full healing.

Maha | Sudan

Pray for me as God continues to shape me here, and pray that the dark clouds of the pandemic soon dissipate.

Prayers for ABTS

Pray for safety of our students who are still in residence. Although we moved our classes online, many of our students were not able to go back to their home countries because of closed airports.

Pray for our academic team and faculty as they continue the academic year online.

Pray for the Institute of Middle East Studies team as they work on reconceptualizing our June consultation and the various peacebuilding programs.

Pray for our institutional sustainability. This corona crisis comes at a time when we're still reeling from the effects of our economic and political crises that started last October.