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NEST

NEWSLETTER

نشرة موسمية
تصدر عن



June 2021

كلية اللاهوت للشرق الأدنى

ISSUED OCCASIONALLY by the NEAR EAST SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY, BEIRUT - LEBANON
FOR RELATED CHURCHES, SUPPORT AGENCIES AND A SMALL CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

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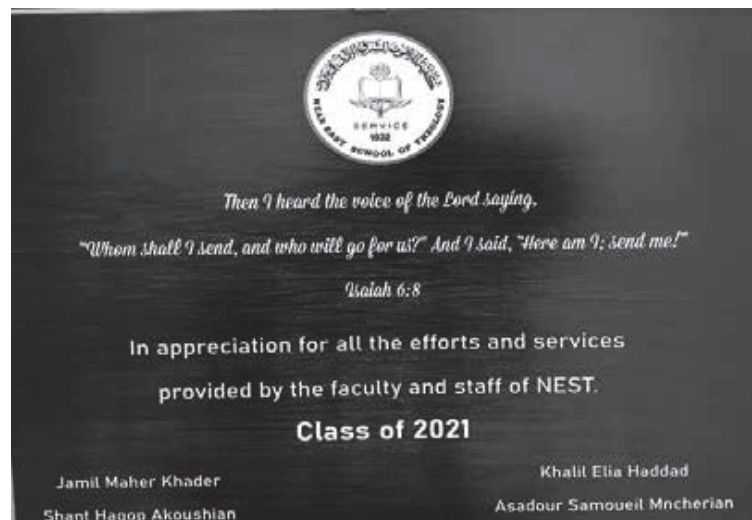
From the President

Here we are! Send us!

Those who attended our Commencement Service on June 12, whether in person or via live-streaming, no doubt noted the last hymn that was sung, “Here I am, Lord”. This is a hymn that became very popular at our Seminary, especially after we acquired the Presbyterian Hymnal for our Chapel services in the early 1990s. The words are based on Isaiah 6 where the prophet receives his call. The Lord asks, “Whom shall I send, who will go for us?”, and Isaiah responds, “Here I am Lord, Send me.” (vv. 8-9). The four M. Div. graduates of this year asked that this hymn be sung, and so we included it. During the Service the graduates presented a gift to the Seminary in remembrance of their time at N.E.S.T. – a plaque on which is written those very words of Is. 6:8.

I was deeply moved by their choice of the hymn and those verses from Isaiah. Here are fresh Middle Eastern graduates from a theological seminary who are declaring, “We are ready to serve you, Lord. Send us where you will”. Young men who will serve the church in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon – three countries that are in terrible shape. Our graduates will be serving and living in countries where there is violence, oppression, occupation, severe economic, social and political crises; three countries many of whose young people are emigrating, fleeing to find better conditions of living elsewhere. And here are young graduates singing, praying, declaring that they are ready to go where the Lord sends them.

If our Seminary is able to continue graduating students with such commitment and resolve, with such a sense of calling and determination, then, no matter the number of students, God is with us and blessing our efforts. We must go on with our mission no matter what befalls us and our countries.



The Commencement

With the improvement in the COVID19 situation and the beginning of vaccination, N.E.S.T. decided to hold a Commencement Service. The 88th Commencement was held on June 12 at 5:00pm with limited attendance, but the whole event was live-streamed. Five students graduated: 3 Lebanese, 1 Syrian and 1 Palestinian. The speaker was Dr. Asaad Skoury, a physician at the American University Medical Center in Beirut. President Sabra introduced the speaker saying that N.E.S.T. wanted to recognize and honor one of those many dedicated health workers who were at the front lines in battling the pandemic. Dr. Skoury spoke about hope and encouraged the graduates to hold on to Christian hope and be ready to witness to it in all circumstances.



Shant Akoushian



Khalil Haddad

The Commencement

Each graduate was also given a book gift to build up their theological library; the gift was made possible by a special donation from the Presbyterian Church in Canada.



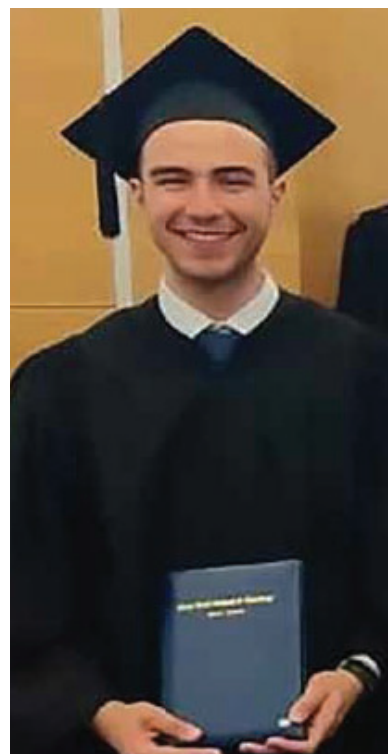
Jamil Khader



Asadour Manjrian



Dr. Asaad Skoury



Youssef Kel Yacoub

Resource Center for Christian Education

Although most of N.E.S.T.'s normal extracurricular activities and educational programs, like the Public Lecture series and the Forum of Christian-Muslim Thought, could not be conducted due to the COVID19 situation and the numerous lockdowns, nevertheless, the Resource Center for Christian Education has been active in organizing Youth and Children Ministry Online and Hybrid Seminars in Syria. Through cooperation with Mrs. Hala Bitar Khoury (part time instructor at N.E.S.T. and helper with our Resource Center activities) and Dr. Pierre Filfili, and in collaboration with the Bible Society in Syria, around 7 sessions of training will be held in various Syrian cities between May and October 2021. Two of those sessions have already been held in Homs. This activity of the Resource Center is mainly supported by donations from DanMission.





Preserving Protestant Heritage

The project of Preserving Protestant Heritage has operated normally despite all the difficulties and interruptions in the country. Director Dr. Maria Bashshur Abunnasr continued to digitize documents from our archives. Most recently digitized material included all the extant records of the Shweir Protestant Church and School (Ain el-Qassis), as well as the Record of the Minutes of the Session of Deir Mimas Presbyterian Church from its establishment in the 19th century until the middle of the 20th century. This work is made possible by a grant from the “Fondation des Cèdres”.



Dr. Maria Bashshur Abunnasr at work

Two Fellowships for Contextual Theology

In agreement and cooperation with Danmission and the Research Program on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development (RCSD) at Humboldt University Berlin, N.E.S.T. is offering two fellowships on the topic of “Contextual Theology for Social Action”. Invitations for applications were sent to all N.E.S.T. graduates and pastors, as well as young scholars in the field of theology.

Applicants are invited to propose a research project that investigates theological approaches to social action that emerge from and are rooted in current Lebanese or Syrian contexts. This can include topics from the field of public theology, ecotheology and the theology of religions.

The aim of the fellowship is to support Lebanese voices of contextual theology and strengthen the link between academic theology and social action by offering local theologians capacity building through continued education. The fellowship is designed to enhance local theologians’ profile and network and connecting their voices to an international audience.

The (paid) fellowship consists of a research and an application component. During the research component, the fellows will research a chosen topic and write an academic paper.

N.E.S.T.: Centre for a Process of Study on Mission

“Cooperation in Mission in the Middle East (1921-2021)” is the title of a missiological study process initiated by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the World Council of Churches on the occasion of the centenary of the founding of the International Missionary Council (IMC, 1921). N.E.S.T. Chaplain and Faculty member, Rev. Dr. Wilbert van Saane, was asked to be the organizer of the work of the study process in the Middle East. The aim is twofold: to reflect on the impact of the IMC/CWME globally and regionally and to reflect on cooperation in mission in the twenty-first century. The CWME has initiated several regional study centres. N.E.S.T. will serve as the study centre for the Middle East.



Rev. Dr. Wilbert van Saane

Dr. Rima Nasrallah addresses German Kirchentag

The German Kirchentag is a huge church congress that is held every 2 years. Over 100,000 participants can choose to attend and take part in around 2000 events over a period of 4 days. This year's congress was an ecumenical gathering from June 13-16, and was an online event only.

N.E.S.T. faculty member, Rev. Dr. Rima Nasrallah was invited to present a pre-recorded Bible Study at this 3rd Ecumenical Kirchentag. The general theme was: “Take a Look” (Mark 6: 38). Dr. Nasrallah's Bible study was based on the text from John 9: 1-12a, “How were your eyes opened?”



Rev. Dr. Rima Nasrallah

Visitors

Travel and visits are rare in the days of COVID19, but as soon as the situation started to improve and vaccinations were being administered here and abroad, some of N.E.S.T.'s old and faithful friends dared to travel and came to visit the Seminary:

- On May 24, a delegation from the Outreach Foundation consisting of Marilyn Borst, Julia Burgess, Jack Baca, Mark Mueller and Nuha Tomeh visited the Seminary and met with President Sabra and faculty members. It was an opportunity to tell the visiting delegation about the situation at N.E.S.T. and in the country in the midst of the several crises that Lebanon is passing through, and also to thank the Outreach Foundation for its continued support of the mission of the Seminary



Visitors



L to R: Sabra, Raheb, Ford, Nasrallah, Awwad.

- Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, Lutheran theologian from Palestine, Founder and President of Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture in Bethlehem, visited N.E.S.T. on June 10, 2021. Dr. Raheb met with President Sabra and members of the Faculty, and discussed theological and political developments in both Lebanon and Palestine. Dr. Raheb presented to N.E.S.T. several books published by the Diyar Publishing House which he heads.

- On the first day of June, Mr. Zaven Khanjian, General Secretary of the Armenian Missionary Association of America (AMAA), who is also a member of N.E.S.T.'s Board of Managers, visited N.E.S.T. along with Rev. Mgrditch Karagoezian, President of the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East. AMAA sponsors several students from the Republic of Armenia who are studying at N.E.S.T.

Faculty Publications in 2020/21

George Sabra

-“Nostra Aetate and the Christians of the Middle East” in: *Nostra Aetate, Non-Christian Religions, and Interfaith Relations*. Edited by Kail C. Ellis. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020: 245-264.

-[“The Role and Contribution of Christian in the Middle East”] in: *N.E.S.T. Theological Review* vol. 41/2 (2020): 141-152.

-Book review: Deanna Ferree Womack, *Protestants, Gender and the Arab Renaissance in Late Ottoman Syria*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019 in: *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*. Vol. 31, no. 4 (2020): 447-448.

Johnny Awwad

“يسوع والمرأة”، في خدمة المرأة في الشرق الأوسط: قراءة لاهوتية وراعية. منشورات السينودس الانجيلي الوطني في سورية ولبنان (2020) : 35-45.

“المرأة في رسائل الرسول بولس”، في خدمة المرأة في الشرق الأوسط: قراءة لاهوتية وراعية. منشورات السينودس الانجيلي الوطني في سورية ولبنان (2020) : 46-67.

-“Apocalyptic Literature for Christian Communities Today,” *The Magi Initiative: East-West* (Beirut: Bible Society, 2020): 83-90.

-“Overview and History of the Teaching of Religion in Lebanon and Syria: The Case of the NESSL Schools,” joint with Khairallah Atallah in: *Thinking about Christian Life in Turmoil Times of the Middle East*. Edited by Martin Tamcke and Claudia Rammelt (Göttingen: Göttingen University, 2020); 45-56.

-“Traits of Women Discipleship in Luke’s Gospel,” *N.E.S.T. Theological Review* 42 (2021): 3-16.

Peter Ford

-“Muslim Minorities in Non-Muslim Lands: A Comparison of the Suwarian Tradition with the Approach of Tariq Ramadan.” *N.E.S.T. Theological Review* 41 (2020): 91–109.

-Book Review: *Sacred Misinterpretation: Reaching across the Christian–Muslim Divide*, by Martin Accad (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), *N.E.S.T. Theological Review* 41 (2020): 84–86.

-Book Review: *Neighbors: Christians and Muslims Building Community*, by Deanna Ferree Womack (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), *N.E.S.T. Theological Review* 41 (2020): 136–139.

Rima Nasrallah van Saane

-‘Oriental Orthodox Young Adults and Liturgical Participation: A Matter of Identity’, *EXCH* 49.3-4 (2020), Brill, 358–378.

-‘Embrace at the International Ecumenical Youth Meeting in Beirut 2019’, *IJPT.2021.0007, International Journal of Practical Theology*, De Gruyter.

Wilbert van Saane

-“Christology and Mission in the Middle East.” In *Witnessing Christ: Contextual and Interconfessional Perspectives on Christology*, edited by Michael Biehl and others. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2020: 85-92.

-“A Fierce ‘Yes’ and a Fierce ‘No’: Revisiting Hendrik Kraemer’s Contribution to the Theology of Religions.” *N.E.S.T. Theological Review* 41 (2020): 48-69.

In Memoriam

Senéad Short, an American young woman, who was a SiMO student at N.E.S.T. in 2018/19, was killed in the Taiwan train crash on April 4, 2021 – Easter Sunday. Senéad had gone to Taiwan to help promote bilingual education at the Tanmmei elementary school.

The news of her death shocked the N.E.S.T. community and all those who knew her in Lebanon. She had left her beautiful mark on our Seminary community, for she was compassionate, bright, hilarious, thoughtful, vivacious, vibrant, and she infected people with those qualities.

N.E.S.T. held a Memorial Service for Senéad on April 8, 2021. Students and friends who knew her spoke about their memories of her.

Thank God for the life of Senéad!

“The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms”. (Deut. 33:27)



Senéad Short 1996- 2021



Memorial Service at N.E.S.T.