

From the President

A Garden at NEST



A few months ago, an NGO called “Goods of our City” approached us and proposed to support a project of urban gardening on the premises of the Seminary. “Goods of Our City”, we were told, is an intervention that addresses the lack of open and green spaces, as well as the issue of food security, through urban agriculture. NEST accepted the proposal and we decided to go ahead with it. NEST is the second place in Beirut (or Lebanon for that matter) to house this initiative. Supplied with wooden planters, soil, and seedlings of various vegetables and fruits that our cafeteria kitchen normally uses, the whole of the NEST community, students, faculty, staff and residents participated in painting the planters and also in the process of planting itself.

The project will be materially beneficial to NEST, as it will supply our kitchen with some vegetables and fruits; it will be ecologically beneficial too for it increases the amount of green space in the city, but, to us, it is above all a symbolic action with a deep spiritual meaning.

I have always been fascinated and inspired by the story of Jeremiah in chapter 32. We find the prophet there languishing in prison. He had opposed the policies of his rulers and was thrown in jail. The country is besieged by the enemy, the situation is desperate, everyone is panicking, the people are in despair, foreign pressure and internal collapse, and people want to emigrate and escape for they see no future for their children in the land of their birth. In the midst of all this, Jeremiah, from jail, conducts a real estate operation, where he buys his cousin's land. He sows seeds of hope for the future in the very land where the situation seems hopeless.

In this country, Lebanon, there is today every reason and cause for despair, frustration and emigration. The economic and financial collapse of the State with all its political and social ramifications envelops the whole country in a black cloud of confusion, hopelessness, and depression. Nothing seems to be moving forward in a positive and promising sense. In the midst of all this, we at NEST decided to plant a garden, and to tend it, hoping to eat of its fruits and hand it over to our successors, for we trust in God's promise of restoration and his faithfulness to his people.

Commencement 2022

The Eighty-Ninth Commencement Service took place on June 11, 2022 in the Grace Chapel. Five students graduated: 1 Bachelor of Theology, 1 Diploma in Theological Studies and 3 M. Div. The Commencement speaker was Dr. F. Peter Ford, Assistant Prof. of Islamic Studies at NEST who is retiring after 10 years in Lebanon, and over 40 years of missionary service in the Middle East and Africa. The text of Dr. Ford's address, "Mission as Pilgrimage: The Example of Abraham" will be available in the November 2022 issue of the *NEST Theological Review*.



Front Row: Shant Aynilian, Khachig Nazaryan, Farah Boukheir, Armen Misakyan, George Shammas

Farewell to Peter and Patti Ford



Peter and Patti Ford

After 10 years of dedicated service to NEST, Dr. F. Peter Ford, Assistant Prof. of Islamic Studies, and wife Patti will be retiring and going back home to the United States. In introducing Dr. Ford as Commencement speaker and paying tribute to his service to NEST, President Sabra said:

“Peter Ford has been a missionary of his church in this region of the world for the last 40 years or so. He has taught and served in Kenya, Ethiopia, Khartoum, Oman and now for the last ten years in Lebanon, at NEST. In addition to his teaching responsibilities, Peter has published many scholarly articles in his field; he has been the Associate Editor of our *NEST Theological Review*, Secretary of the Faculty, and active member of the community at large, not only in spiritual and social activities, but also in sports – quite an accomplished volleyball and table tennis player.

I take this opportunity to thank Peter and Patti for their dedicated and faithful service to our Seminary in the last 10 years. Patti has helped out with teaching Bible Survey courses; she has been a most valuable assistant in our Library, a most committed and active member in the Spiritual life committee, and organizer of our spiritual retreats and chapels services.

Peter has been a faithful and dedicated teacher and a meticulous scholar. But he also was an active member of the Pastoral Church Committee of All Saints International Congregation, Beirut and Sunday worship coordinator and occasional preacher.

On behalf of the whole NEST community, Board of Managers, faculty, administration, staff and students, I would like to express our gratitude to Peter and Patti for their faithfulness, loyalty and service to this institution.”

Public Lectures

Three Public Lectures were held in the academic year 2021/22, after having stopped public gatherings due to COVID for almost 2 years:

December 9, 2021

**“We Choose Abundant Life”
Christians in the Middle East:
Towards Renewed Theological, Political and Social Choices**

Fr. Rouphael Zghaib
Fr. Boulsos Wehbe
Dr. Johnny Awwad



Fr. Wehbe, Dr. Nasrallah (moderator), Fr. Zghaib, Dr. Awwad

April 21, 2022

“The Church in the Public Sphere”



Rev. Najla Kassab

May 5, 2022

**“Israel and Christ:
Revisiting Romans 9 – 11”**



Archmandrite Dr. Jack Khalil

Resource Center Activities

The Resource Center continued organizing Youth and Children Ministry Online and Hybrid Workshops in Syria. Through cooperation with Mrs. Hala Bitar Khoury (Instructor at N.E.S.T. and helper with our Resource Center activities) and Dr. Pierre Filfli, and in collaboration with the Bible Society in Syria, several sessions were held in Homs (Syria), at the Roman Catholic Church of the Savior from April 12-14, 2022.



Homs Workshop

A two-day workshop for Sunday School teachers who have been ministering to children at the National Evangelical Church of Beirut was also organized and conducted by the Resource Center. The workshop was led by NEST faculty member Dr. Rima Nasrallah van Saane, Instructor Hala Khoury and Dr. P. Filifli.



Beirut Church Training

Both these activities were made possible by a grant from Danmission

Dr. Sabra Lectures in Chicago

By invitation from the Chicago Committee for Global Mission, Dr. Sabra travelled to Chicago to deliver a lecture at the World Mission Institute on March 10, 2022 on “Mission in a Collapsing State: The Church and Theological Education in Lebanon Today”. Dr. Rob Worley, longtime friend of NEST and the Evangelical churches in Lebanon, was the host and organizer of the activity. Dr. Sabra had occasion to speak about NEST in the lecture, as well in a special meeting with members of the Middle East Task Force of the Chicago Presbytery. He also met with some faculty members of McCormick Theological Seminary.



Prof. Ted Hiebert, Dr. Sabra, Dr. Tamar Wasoian ('96), Dr. Rob Worley

Spring Retreat

As has become customary every Spring, NEST held a one-day trip/Retreat on May 7. The trip took students and faculty members to the oldest Maronite Church in Lebanon in Yanouh, in the district of Byblos, which also has the oldest patriarchal seat of the Maronite Church. At that site, the NEST group reflected on God's Word, prayed and sang hymns. Later on the group visited a local winery and the Afqa grotto, after having had lunch in Qartaba.



NEST Group in Yanouh

NEST-SiMO Consultation

The Seventh International Consultation between NEST and the “Studies in the Middle East Program” (SiMO) Board in Germany took place in Beirut from April 20-22, 2022. Every couple of years, NEST and the organizers of the SiMO program in Germany meet to discuss a common theological theme, and also to evaluate the SiMO program and plan for the future. The Consultation consisted of 15 members from Germany and 15 from Lebanon, and it gathered around the theme “Public Theology”. We heard presentations about the meaning and application of Public Theology, as well as about specific topics related to it. The Opening session was attended by the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany who showed interest in the topic of the Consultation as well as in the SiMO program. Bishop Paul Abdel Sater, Maronite Bishop of Beirut, also addressed the group on the Maronite involvement in public matters and received the members of the Consultation in his residence in Beirut.



Meeting with Bishop P. Abdel Sater



SiMO Alumni (Friends of NEST Association) delivering book gifts to NEST



NEST-SiMO Consultation

SiMO Students

Due to COVID conditions several applicants to the SiMO program cancelled their participation for this year, but two young Canadian women, Joefin Peters and Sarah Janzen, were undeterred. Both are spending 10 months at NEST, as SiMO students and as volunteers with the Mennonite Central Committee in Beirut.

In their Farewell Chapel service they had profound and touching things to say about their experience:

Joefin:

“When I reflect on this year, I think the one thing that stands out starkly to me is the word ‘privilege’...

First and foremost, I had the privilege of taking a year off to serve abroad. Not everyone can leave behind their commitments for a year, but I was able to. My goal for this year was to find my place in the world; for God to point me in a direction in my life where I can apply myself.

Next, we were extremely privileged that during this time we were able to experience Lebanon as NEST students. We had 18 hours of electricity and hot water and 24 hours of wifi when others couldn’t say the same. The numerous fieldtrips we have gone on, the four courses we have taken, the two retreats we have been a part of and the NEST consultation have all been such a privilege.

I have felt immensely privileged by the NEST community. In the first semester, I was privileged enough to have game nights and be a part of impromptu worship sessions and mini dance parties. I was privileged enough to be the student council’s secretary and help out as needed. A personal favourite is getting to eat meals together and I have



Sarah and Joefin

always had the privilege of engaging in such great conversations...

I also have had the privilege of walking alongside people as they went through the Lebanese context and everything that came with it. I had the privilege of being a listening ear and friend ...

When I go back to Canada, I know that I will struggle with the sheer privileges my context has. I think it will be the small things that will get me. And, my hope for when I go back is that, like the song will also mention, I will be a living voice about the Lebanese and Syrian contexts because being here has driven the point across to me that it is my duty to use my privilege for good.”

Sarah:

“I came into this year not knowing what to expect or what I would learn. During our orientation time for the ... program, we

were repeatedly told that we need to be ready to adjust our expectations and be open to learning even by simply being with other people...

It took me a little time to adjust my mindset to become a student again, but it's been a great intentional shift both in the classroom and outside. I remember being overwhelmed initially by the volume of new information I was always taking in and I could not keep up. I'm grateful that people were and are patient with me and willing to explain basic things about Lebanon, or Armenia, or Syria.

Looking back, I see that the things I felt unable to learn as deeply as I wanted at the time, still had an impact down the road. I have recognized that some of those ideas led to a gradual shift in my mindset, and some of the questions we asked in class have stuck with me. Questions we talked about months

ago still pop into my mind and I can see that the responses I had at the time have grown and evolved....

And I've learned things not only from class, but from living here and being a part of the NEST community. I truly value getting to share meals, have discussions in the hallway, and talking about our various traditions (be it religious traditions, family traditions, or cultural traditions). It helps me see new ways of viewing the world and brings us closer in the process.

I want to encourage you to continue identifying your gifts, and learning from the gifts that other people or places share with you. As Paul says in Romans, "If it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully."

Online Diploma in Arabic

With the beginning of the second semester in last February NEST launched a new online Diploma in Theological Studies in the Arabic language. Twenty-three persons from Syria and Lebanon (5 from Lebanon; 18 from Syria) registered in the online course "Introduction to the Old Testament" offered by the Rev. Dr. Issa Diab. Evaluations by participants have been very positive. Both the quality of teaching and the benefit from the course have been highly praised by participants. NEST is greatly encouraged by the success of this initiative, and it plans to continue in the fall with "Introduction to the New Testament" be given by Dr. Johnny Awwad, Associate Prof. of New Testament. Those who are interested to register should contact Mrs. Maruzella Abboud: mabboud@theonest.edu.lb



Ecumenical and Interreligious Study Programs

NEST was invited to participate in a conference held in Frankfurt, Germany, from June 17-19, 2022 on the topic “Ecumenical and Interreligious Study Programs: Experiences from Beirut, Hyderabad, Jerusalem and Kyoto.” The aim of the meeting was to analyze, compare and evaluate the specific experiences of students and participants in such programs in non-European countries in order to comprehend and assess the benefits of ecumenical and interreligious learning abroad. Several German churches and church organizations were the organizers. Dr. Sabra was invited to speak about the SiMO and Pastors Sabbatical Programs at NEST. Several former participants of the programs at NEST also attended and reported about their experiences in Beirut. Both programs at NEST were positively assessed, and it was clear that the churches and boards backing these programs wished to continue supporting them and encourage German students and pastors to take part.



Andreas Herrman, G. Sabra, Bernd Apel, Christina Schnepel, Uwe Gräbe

Alumni News

Two alumnae of NEST were ordained in the course of the academic year 2021/22:

-**Sylvie Avakian Mamarbashi** (M. Div. '07) now living and working in Germany with her family, was ordained on September 19, 2021 in the German Lutheran Church of Württemberg. She now serves the Evangelical congregation of Horb-Dettingen in Southwest Germany.



Ordination of Sylvie Avakian



Giving the benediction

-**Mathilde Mikhael Sabbagh** (M. Div. '16), was ordained on Sunday April 3, 2022 in the Presbyterian Church in Hasakeh, Syria, where she is currently serving.



Revs.: F. Farah, M. Bitar ('88), J. Kassab ('88), M. Sabbagh ('16), P. Zaour '80), H. Ghantous ('03)

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