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NEST

NEWSLETTER

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

نشرة موسمية
تصدر عن



December 2022

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From the President

N.E.S.T.: 90 Years and Still Going Strong!

November 11, 2022, marked the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Near East School of Theology (1932-2022). We have not planned any public commemorations or celebrations of this anniversary mainly out of a sense of responsibility and solidarity with the overwhelming number of people in this country who are finding it difficult to procure daily bread. But it behooves us to pause today and marvel at the story of this theological seminary that has survived the last 90 years, prospering at many times, and enduring great difficulties and crises at others.

Since 1932, our School of Theology has experienced difficult and prosperous times; it faced many a crisis in the country and the region. Born under the French mandate over Lebanon, NEST has gone through World War II, Lebanon's struggle for independence (1943), the Arab-Israeli War and the catastrophic consequences of the establishment of the State of Israel (1949), the ensuing Arab-Israeli conflicts, invasions and occupations up until today, the civil strife in Lebanon (1958) and then the Lebanese War (1975-90), and the tension and instability in Lebanon during the Syrian hegemony of the country (1990-2005), as well as the repercussions of the "Arab Spring" in neighboring countries. The list is endless, but NEST withstood all those events and crisis and has continued to serve the churches of the Middle East by providing ministerial training and theological education, and promoting ecumenical relations among Christians and Christian-Muslim dialogue.

We give thanks to God above all for enabling us to reach this day in the history of our Seminary. God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has accompanied and protected us by His Holy Spirit throughout nine decades. Without God's faithfulness, our faithfulness to this institution and the hard work of all who have overseen and managed it, taught and worked in it, would not have been possible. We also thank the Middle Eastern Protestant Churches for continuing to believe in the mission of this Seminary, as well as our many friends and partners all over the Christian world without whose faithful support NEST would not have survived in difficult times.

May God bless our efforts and enable us to continue for another 90 years ...at least!

Beginning of the School year

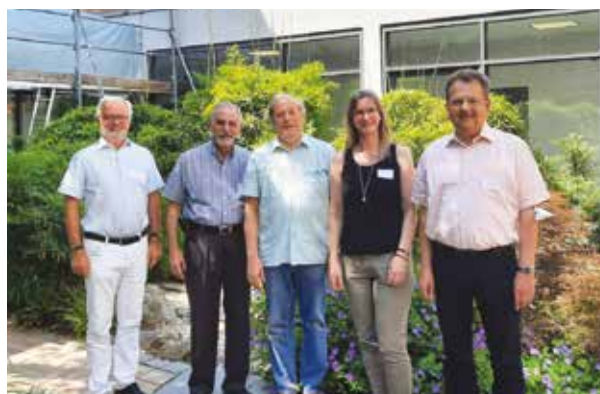
Classes began on Sept. 26 as planned. The Opening Convocation Service was held on the same day at 12:00pm, attended by students, faculty members, and staff. President Sabra introduced and welcomed 4 new students from Lebanon, Syria, Armenia and South Korea, as well as 5 students from Germany in the Studies in the Middle East program (SiMO). There are 48 students at the beginning of the first semester in the various degree and online programs. He also welcomed adjunct professor in Islamic Studies, Dr. Martin Accad, and in Systematic Theology, Dr. Kees van der Kniff (Netherlands). Dr. Sabra went on to reflect on the words of the prophet Habakuk who continued to hope and trust in God and in a new day in spite of all that was collapsing, decaying and drying up around him.



Opening Convocation

Consultation on Ecumenical & Interreligious Study Programs

NEST was invited to participate in an international consultation in Germany that discussed “Ecumenical and Interreligious Study Programs” which German churches and other organizations run or support in several parts of the world. Dr. Sabra represented the Seminary at the meeting, which was held in Frankfurt from June 17-19, 2022. He presented the two programs that NEST runs: The “Studies in the Middle East Program” and the “Pastors Sabbatical Program”. Other similar programs conducted in Hyderabad (India), Jerusalem and Kyoto (Japan), were presented and the participants discussed ways of cooperation with each other in terms of networking, exchange of lecturers, sharing of library resources and exchange of publications. It was also an occasion for Dr. Sabra to reunite with former participants in the Pastors Sabbatical.



Andreas Herrmann, G. Sabra, Bernd Apel, Christina Schnepel and Uwe Gröbe



The Frankfurt Meeting

Continuing Education Program

After an interruption of 2 years due to COVID and the deteriorating situation in Lebanon and Syria, NEST was able to resume its Continuing Education activity for its alumni in the summer. Thanks to funds provided by Danmission, the Continuing Education Seminar could be held for the first time outside of NEST. From the 14th-16th of September, 21 alumni and faculty members from Lebanon and Syria met at Hotel Le Crillon in Broumana. The theme of the Seminar was “The New Testament Teaching on Resurrection and Eternal Life: Implications for Preaching, Teaching and Pastoral Care.” The Seminar discussed the book of the world-famous New Testament scholar, N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church*. Members of the faculty, as well as the participants, presented the themes and led the discussions. During the meeting, a zoom conversation was held with the author, Prof. Wright on the ideas of the book.



NEST alumni group



*Continuing Education Seminar
in session*

ACO Centennial

NEST partner, Action Chrétienne en Orient (ACO), celebrated its centennial celebration (1922-2022) in France in October. It was attended by many partners and friends from all over the world. NEST was also invited to the commemoration and was represented by the Rev. Dr. Wilbert van Saane. Many alumni of NEST were also present. ACO has been a member of NEST's Board of Managers for the last 37 years. NEST is grateful and appreciative of the support of ACO over the years.



H. Akbasharian, S. Hanna, M. Shanazari, H. Shanazari, W. van Saane, M. Schöni, F. Gangloff, S. Terzian, H. Ghantous, L. Gangloff

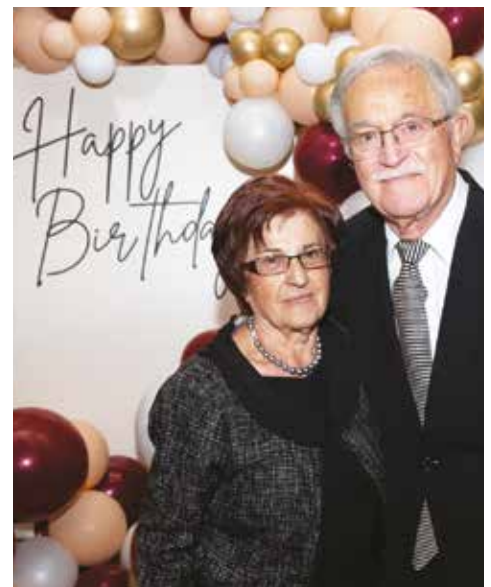
Rev. John Melkonian, NEST Alumnus ('56), Celebrates 90 Years of God's Blessings

Rev. John Melkonian was honored by family and friends with a surprise celebration of his 90th birthday on Friday, December 3, 2021, at Phoenicia Restaurant in Glendale, California. Over 125 guests including relatives, former students, colleagues, ministers, representatives of community organizations and members of the Armenian press gathered to celebrate the life and ministry of Rev. Melkonian. The evening was one of jubilation and praise. It was an opportunity to praise God for the favor of a long and fruitful life, and to thank Him for His enduring love and faithfulness.

Doris and Arda, Rev. Melkonian's daughters, described a nurturing, attentive, and exemplary father who, along with their mother, created a happy, loving, joy-filled home. They portrayed a man of deep faith and integrity, a dedicated servant of God, a kind and sweet soul with a compassionate heart, who has touched many lives, never seeking recognition or applause.

Recognizing God's blessings in the 90 years of their father's life, Doris and Arda announced their gift of \$90,000 to be distributed among institutions of higher learning where their father has been educated; communities and churches where he has ministered; and organizations where he has served. The recipients of \$10,000 each are: Near East School of Theology (Lebanon), Haigazian University (Lebanon), Armenian Community of Kessab (Syria), Armenian Evangelical Secondary School of Anjar (Lebanon), Shamlian-Tatigian Armenian Evangelical School (Lebanon), Armenian Cilicia Evangelical Church (United States), Armenian Evangelical Brethren Church (United States), Church of the Nazarene World Missions (United States), and Sahag Mesrob Armenian Christian School (United States).

Celebrating this wonderful milestone with Rev. Melkonian were his colleagues, several of whom are alumni of NEST: Reverends Daniel Albarian, Berdj Djambazian, Vatche Ekmekjian, Vartkes Kassouni, John Khanjian, Soghomon Kilaghbian, Darwin Ng, Joe Matossian, Serop Megerditchian, Hendrik Shanazarian, and Ron Tovmassian.



Rev. and Mrs. John and Jeanette Melkonian

Seminary Retreat

As is usual at the beginning of the academic year, and as an important part of the spiritual life at the Seminary, a 2-day Retreat was held on the weekend of October 21 at the Evangelical Conference Center in Dhour Shweir. Twenty participants (students and faculty) gathered together for worship, discussion, fellowship, social activities and deeper personal acquaintance. The theme of this year's Retreat was "Vocation". Short presentations and Bible studies were conducted by NEST Chaplain, Rev. Wilbert van Saane and members of the Spiritual Life Committee, and there was one panel discussion in which the participants listened to the personal experiences and reflections of invited guests: Dr. Martin Accad (Arab Baptist Theol. Seminary), Father Barouyr Shernezian, (Armenian Orthodox Church), and Mrs. Kate Mayhew, (Mennonite Central Committee, Beirut).



Retreaters in Dhour Shweir Center

Online Diploma Program

The Arabic Online Diploma in Theological Studies offered its second course in this fall semester. Dr. Johnny Awwad, Associate Prof. of New Testament, is teaching "Introduction to the New Testament". Twenty-three students are registered in it.



Resource Center Activities

The NEST Resource Center for Christian Education, in cooperation with the Bible Society in Syria, continued to organize training sessions for young people. From the 27th – 29th of July, 2022, 3 days of training were held via zoom for a group of 22 church workers in Homs, Syria. The topics covered were “Facilitators’ Skills”, “Age Characteristics of Young Adults”, and “Leadership Skills.” Ms. Hala Bitar Khoury (Instructor at NEST) and Dr. Pierre Filfili were the main speakers. The activity was supported by a grant from NEST partner, Danmission.



Trainees in Homs

Swiss Theologians' Study Seminar at NEST

A group of professors and students from the Theological Faculty of the Swiss University of Basel visited Lebanon and conducted their study trip in collaboration with NEST faculty. Drs. Nasrallah and Sabra addressed the group and organized meetings and field trips for them; Dr. Accad also took the group to an interreligious encounter with Sheikh Mohammad Abi Zayd in Sidon along with his Islam class.



Joint field visit of Basel Group with NEST Class to Armenian Apostolic Church, Antelias

Public Lecture

Reinhold Bernhardt, Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Basel, delivered a Public lecture at NEST on December 9, 2022 under the title, “Music and Art as Media in Interreligious Encounters”



Prof. R. Bernhardt

Visit of the Bishop of Truro

The Rt. Rev. Philip Mountstephen, Bishop of the Church of England, Diocese of Truro in the province of Canterbury, visited NEST, on October 13, and spoke in the Noon Chapel Service. Bishop Philip was on a visit to Lebanon, where he met church leaders and also delivered a lecture at the St. Joseph University on religious freedom. He is well known as an advocate for religious freedom, having headed the United Kingdom’s independent governmental review into the persecution of Christians around the world.



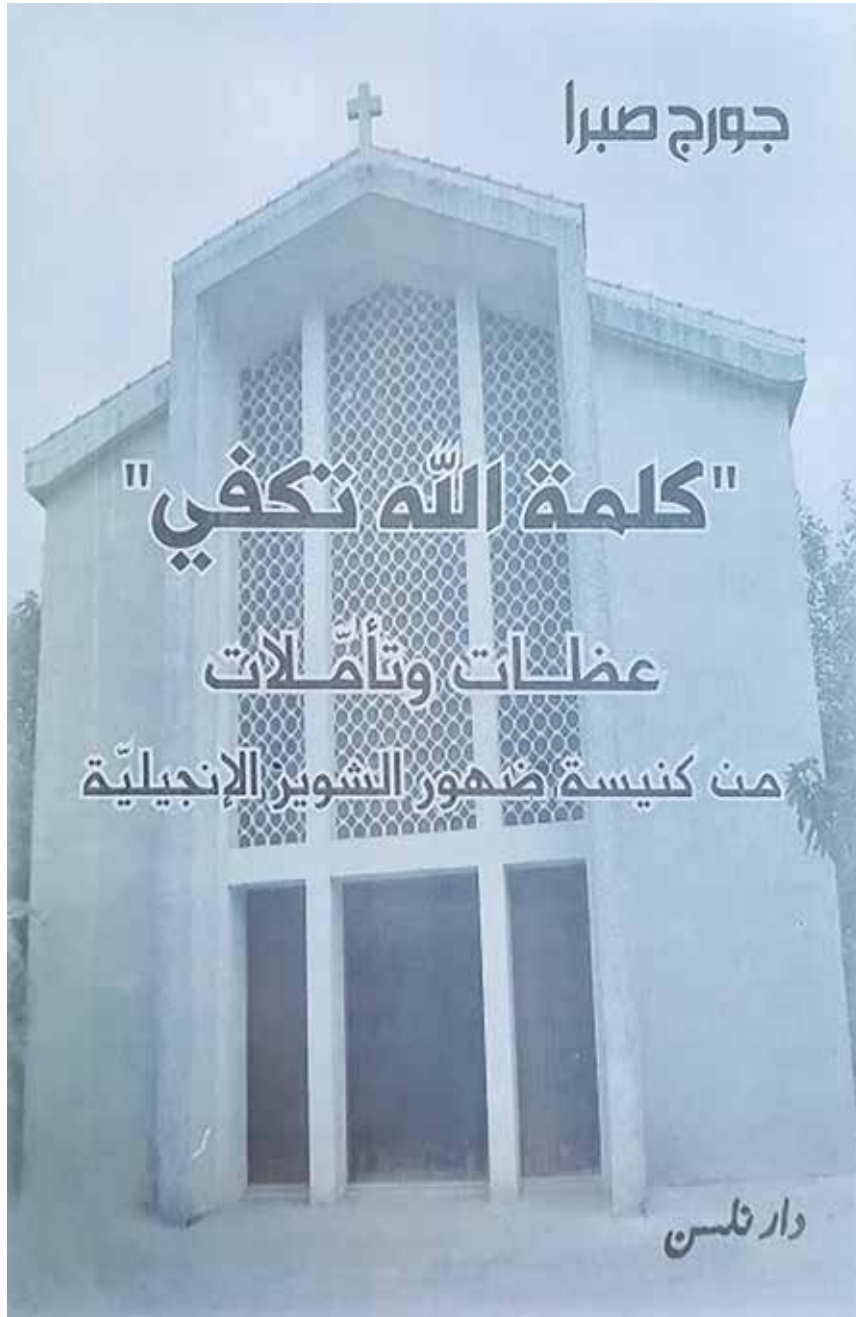
Visiting Delegation with NEST Faculty



Bishop Philip in NEST Chapel Service

Publication of Book of Sermons

On the occasion of 25 years of the return of worship services to the Protestant Church of Dhour Shweir after the Lebanese war, the Church sponsored a project of publishing a selection of the sermons given in that church over the last quarter of a century by Dr. George Sabra. Dr. Sabra has been the pastoral coordinator and preacher at the Dhour Church for that whole period. The Sermons are in Arabic, and the book, entitled “The Word of God Suffices” was distributed gratis in a ceremony held in the Church on July 31, 2022.



Fifth NEST Alumna Ordained in Lebanon

Linda Macktaby, (M. Div. 2009), was ordained as minister of the Protestant Church of Kfarshima on Sunday June 26, 2022. The Church of Kfarshima, in the Beirut suburbs, is an independent congregational church that is a member of the National Evangelical Union in Lebanon, headed by the National Evangelical Church of Beirut. Linda is now the fifth woman to be ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacraments in the whole Middle East. All five are NEST graduates



Congratulations, Rev. Linda!

Thank You!

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Merry Christmas

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You will receive a receipt from the office in Louisville for your tax-deductible contribution.

You will also receive a letter of thanks from the President of N.E.S.T..

Your contribution is deeply appreciated

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