

From The President

Future generations will no doubt look upon 2017 as a historic year for the churches and societies of the Middle East, but also and especially for the Near East School of Theology. Two of N.E.S.T.'s alumnae were ordained in the Presbyterian Church of Syria and Lebanon, known as the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon. Rola Sleiman ('97) was ordained in the Tripoli congregation on February 27, and Najla Kassab ('87) in the Rabiye congregation on March 24. N.E.S.T. community - faculty and students - were in attendance in both events. N.E.S.T. felt proud of its alumnae who became the pioneers of women's full ministry in the Protestant Churches of the Middle East. Not only a feeling of taking pride in its graduates, but also a feeling of success and gratification overwhelmed us at N.E.S.T. For years our Seminary has been promoting women's full ministry in the church, including ordination; for years our faculty have taught and supported and argued for women's ordination, and now it has become a reality.

I had the privilege and the honor to be invited to preach at Najla's ordination service, and I would like here to share briefly with the readers of our Newsletter some of what was said:

"...this day is the work of the Holy Spirit in history, the Spirit of truth whom Jesus promised to send and of whom he said, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (Jn 16:13). As the Spirit of truth guides us to ordain women – yesterday in Tripoli, today in Rabiya – the Spirit is placing our Middle Eastern Protestant churches once again on the prophetic track. Protestant Christianity understands itself to be the continuation or the revival of the prophetic stream in the history of salvation. Prophets in Holy Scriptures are not those who predict the future; rather, they are the ones who speak truth to their generation, to the present, to the community of faith as well as to the political and social establishment on the basis of their profound understanding of the Word of God, an understanding that



Revs. Rola and Najla

penetrates beneath superficial and literal readings of that Word. The Spirit of truth has brought us here, saying to us: open wide all doors for women, for their ministry and role - in the church and in society. Prophets do not restrict their discourse to the narrow religious and spiritual domains of human beings; they address all aspects of life, for the Word of God reaches and addresses all creation. Prophets say "No" to their society when necessary; they reject its customs and traditions and what is taken for granted; they attack its comfort and self-sufficiency and its waywardness; they shake all that people place their trust in, other than the living God.

As the church in our region confronts a situation in which there is an increase in religious extremism, intellectual rigidity, cultural reactionism and social isolationism, and in the midst of a situation in which there is an increase in terrorism, oppression, injustice, trampling upon human rights, suppression of freedoms, especially the rights and freedoms of women, the church has no weapon other than that of word and example; and so it ordains a female servant of the Word and provides an example to its context."

Public Lectures 2016-2017

Most of the monthly Public Lectures focused on the theme of the Reformation – with 2017 being the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Speakers from Lebanon and abroad addressed related issues and topics in lectures given in English as well as Arabic.

November 17, 2016

***Martin Luther's Polemic against Islam:
Are there Positive Lessons for
Christians Today?***



F. Peter Ford, Ph. D.
*Assistant Prof. of
Islamic Studies,
N.E.S.T.*

December 15, 2016

***Frustrated with God
A Syrian Theologian's Reflection on
Habakuk***



Panel Discussion of the book of Rev. Dr. Riad Kassis
Rev. Dr. Issa Diab, Dr. Mary Mikhael, Dr. Rima Nasrallah.

January 19, 2017

***Practicing the Hospitality of Christ:
Seeking to Reconcile Diversity***

Prof. Clive Pearson
Charles Stuart University, Australia



Public Lectures 2016-2017

● February 16, 2017

The Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on Justification

(Delivered in Arabic)



Prof. Antoine Flefjel
Catholic University of Lille

.....
● March 23, 2017

The Impact of Protestantism on Middle Eastern Islamic Society

(Delivered in Arabic)



Prof. Mahmoud Haddad
Balamand University

● April 6, 2017

Reforming Christian Mission



Prof. Robert S. Heaney
Virginia Theological Seminary, USA

.....
● May 18, 2017

Protestant Mission Schools and Lebanese Women: Between Self-Realization and Role Ambiguity



Dr. Rima Nasrallah van Saane
Assistant Prof. of Practical Theology, N.E.S.T.

Resource Center Activities

The Resource Center for Christian Education and Women's Studies contributes to N.E.S.T.'s Public Theological Education and Leadership Training programs. This year the following activities took place:

"Bibliodrama"



A spiritual journey of growth in personal religious life led by DanMission's Rev. Agnete Holm.

Teenology 501



An on-going series of training sessions for youth leaders. Two sessions were held on March 18: Session I was led by Mr. John Sagherian on the topic "Mentoring: A good way to pour yourself into others and prepare future leaders". Session II was led by Mr. Nabil Habibi on the topic "How to prepare for a youth camp?" Thirty participants came from different churches, schools and organizations.

Christian-Muslim Dialogue Events

The Forum of Christian-Muslim Thought held two major events in this academic year:

The first session was held in November. It was entitled: "Common Teachings Between the Druze and the Christians", and it was delivered by Sheikh Dr. Sami Abou el Mouna.



Sheikh Sami Abou el Mouna



The second event was held in February; it was a dialogue between two prominent Muslim scholars: the Sunni Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Kheir Faraj and the Shi'ite Sheikh Dr. Ja'afar Fadlallah on the topic: "Is there an Ecumenical Movement among the Sects in Contemporary Islam"? It was actually a trialogue between Sunnis, Shi'ites and the mainly Christian audience.

Faraj, Sabra, Fadlallah

N.E.S.T. Sundays in Local Churches

Every spring semester groups of students and professors visit local Protestant churches and speak about N.E.S.T. and participate in worship. The following churches were visited between March and early June 2017:

Dr. Sabra with students and members of the congregation at Marash Armenian Evangelical Church, Bourj Hammoud.



Mrs. Geotcherian-Jackson with students and parishioners at the Presbyterian Church in Alma el Sha'ab, South Lebanon

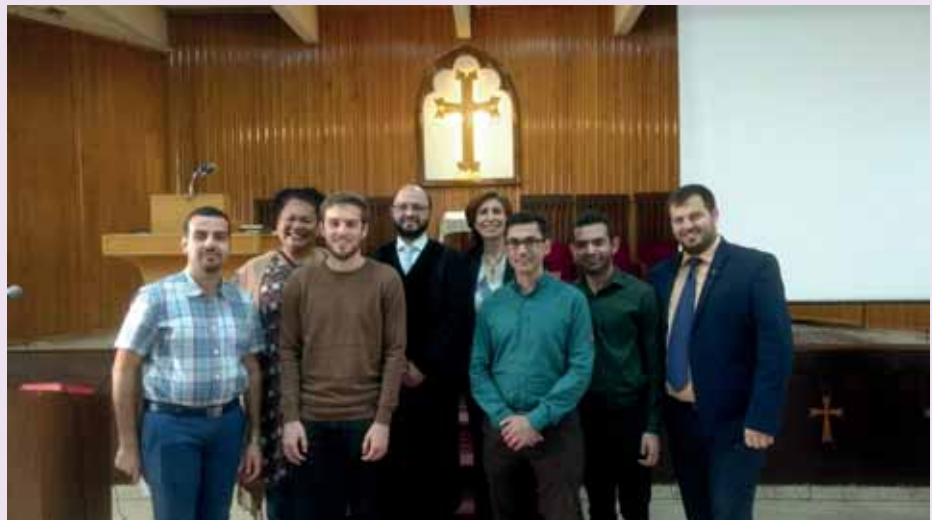
Dr. Peter Ford and students at All Saints International Congregation (Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem), Beirut



Dr. Johnny Awwad with students and Rev. Habib Badr at the National Evangelical Church of Beirut.



Dr. Rima Nasrallah van Saane with students and Rev. Sevak Trashian at the Emmanuel Armenian Evangelical Church, Bourj Hammoud



In 'Ammiq

N.E.S.T. in Armenia



Dr. Rima Nasrallah van Saane and Armenian group

Upon the request of the Evangelical Church in Armenia and the Armenian Missionary Association of America, two of our faculty members, Dr. Rima Nasrallah van Saane and Mrs. Shaké Geotcherian Jackson, travelled to Armenia for two weeks in April.

Dr. Nasrallah offered a Seminar on Preaching for 30 Armenian pastors in the Kotayk area from 17-19 April. Over a period of 3 days she offered 5 lectures. The first and last sessions were also attended by the wives of the pastors. The seminar was very lively and highly appreciated. The Armenian Missionary Association of America and the participating pastors expressed the wish to have more sessions offered in the future.

Ms. Geotcherian spent 8 days in Armenia in which she taught a compact course on “Teaching Ministry of the Church”. She held two training sessions for lay leaders serving in the four Armenian Evangelical churches in Yerevan. These consisted of Sunday

school teachers, junior youth leaders, young adults leaders, couple’s group leaders and women’s groups leaders. In each session there were around 25-30 participants.



Ms. Shaké Geotcherian Jackson and group

Trip to Anfeh



St. Catherine's Orthodox Church

The annual Spring Trip/Retreat took place on May 13, 2017. It consisted of a one-day trip to the northern coastal town of Anfeh. Twenty-nine students and faculty members took part. The purpose of the trip was to learn about the rich archaeological and Christian history of the town. Several ancient churches - Byzantine and Crusader - as well as two Orthodox monasteries were visited, and there was ample time for fellowship, prayer and singing.



Singing and praying

Visitors

Marilyn Borst, Associate Director of the **Outreach Foundation** and longtime friend and supporter of N.E.S.T., led a group of 10 American pastors and church leaders on a visit to Syria and Lebanon in January 2017. The Outreach Foundation has been generously supporting Syrian students for several years now. It was an occasion to meet with some of the students, as well with the faculty.



An official delegation from the **Uniting Church in Australia**, headed by the President of the Uniting Church, Pastor Stuart McMillan and the National Director of Uniting World, Mr. Rob Floyd, visited Lebanon in the third week of January 2017. The visit involved meetings with heads of various Christian churches and Lebanese political officials. One day was spent at N.E.S.T., where the delegation had a discussion with President Sabra and members of the faculty about possible cooperation between Australian churches and seminaries with N.E.S.T. The visit was organized and coordinated by our alumni, the Rev. Krikor Youmshajekian (M. Div. '83) and Levon Kardashian (M. Div. '03). The delegation was also accompanied by Rev. Gaby Kobrossi – an old friend of our Seminary.

A team from **Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church, Pennsylvania (BMPC)**, visited N.E.S.T. in February while on a trip to Syria and Lebanon. The group of six, accompanied by Rev. Elmarie Parker, met with the President who gave them an overview of N.E.S.T.'s ministry and the situation in the region. Then they listened to two presentations by faculty members, Dr. Nasrallah van Saane and Dr. F. Peter Ford, on Eastern Churches and Christian Muslim-Relations respectively. BMPC has been a partner and supporter of the Seminary for over 15 years now.



Bryn Mawr Church group

Visitors



PCUSA Delegation with Deputy Dr. Farid el-Khazen

A high-level delegation from the **Presbyterian Church USA** visited Lebanon in March. Co-Moderator of PCUSA, Rev. Dr. Jan Edmiston, Ruling Elder Luis de la Rosa, Interim Executive Director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, Rev. Philip Woods, Area Coordinator for the Middle East, Ms. Sara Lisherness, Director of the Compassion, Peace and Justice Ministry, Rev. Laurie Kraus, Director of the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, and Mr. Ryan Smith, PCUSA Director of the U.N. Office in New York, accompanied by Rev. Elmarie Parker, spent half a day at N.E.S.T. where they met with Dr. Sabra, and listened to an analysis of the political situation in the region by member of the Lebanese parliament and Professor of Political Science, Dr. Farid el-Khazen.

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Also in March, twenty-five **German Church Deans** and church leaders from the German Lutheran Church in the district of Heilbronn visited N.E.S.T. as part of a study tour in the country. The group was accompanied by Rev. Dr. Uwe Gräbe, EMS representative on the Board of Managers of N.E.S.T. President Sabra addressed the group on the mission of the seminary. in Lebanon and the region. They also met with faculty and students, especially the German students in the Studies in the Middle East program (SiMO).



Addressing the German Delegation in the Bailey Chapel

Visitors



The Awareness Foundation

The **Awareness Foundation** – a London-based Christian organization that is dedicated to healing through education – visited Lebanon in April. The delegation was led by the Director of Awareness, the Rev. Nadim Nassar – a graduate of N.E.S.T. (B.Th. '88). The delegation had encounters with the major religious leaders of the country as well as heads of churches and church organizations. One day was spent at N.E.S.T., where the group was introduced to the work of the Seminary, in particular its role in Christian-Muslim dialogue, attended a prayer service with the community, then had lunch with faculty and students.

Drama Workshop

Dr. Rima Nasrallah, Assistant Prof. for Practical Theology, launched a new activity at N.E.S.T. A Drama Workshop was introduced for the first time this year. Its aim was to coach and help the students tune their body language and speech skills. In a team of 12 to 14 participants, they could enjoy some acting games, vocal exercises, improvisation, short dialogues and expressive acting. The group met every Thursday evening for two intensive hours of drama followed by half an hour of creative reflection on what was achieved in the sessions. These reflections were recorded in diary forms and the participants could keep them for future reference.



Alumni News

Lukas Reineck, former student in the SiMO program (2013/14) was recently appointed Project Manager at the German organization, Christlicher Hilfsbund im Orient. After having spent two semesters at N.E.S.T. and having finished his theological studies in Germany, he was offered this job. He will be involved in project assistance related to the countries of Armenia, Lebanon and Syria. Lukas visited Beirut and N.E.S.T. again in May of this year in his capacity as Project Manager of Hilfsbund.



Lukas Reineck

Shahrazad Dezhbod (B. Th. C.E. '03), wife of Rev. Samer Kondalaft (B. Th. C.E. '02), was ordained and installed into the Barrhaven Mission work in the Presbytery of Ontario, Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC). After her studies at N.E.S.T. and after serving with her husband in Presbyterian Church of Sidon for several years, the family emigrated to Canada. Shahrazad felt called to ministry, and so became an ordination candidate in PCC. The General Assembly asked her to complete two full semesters to get to know more about the PCC. She was ordained on May 7, 2017.



Shahrazad Kandalaft's ordination

Congratulations Shahrazad!

Renovated Floor of Student Lounge



Aram at work late at night!

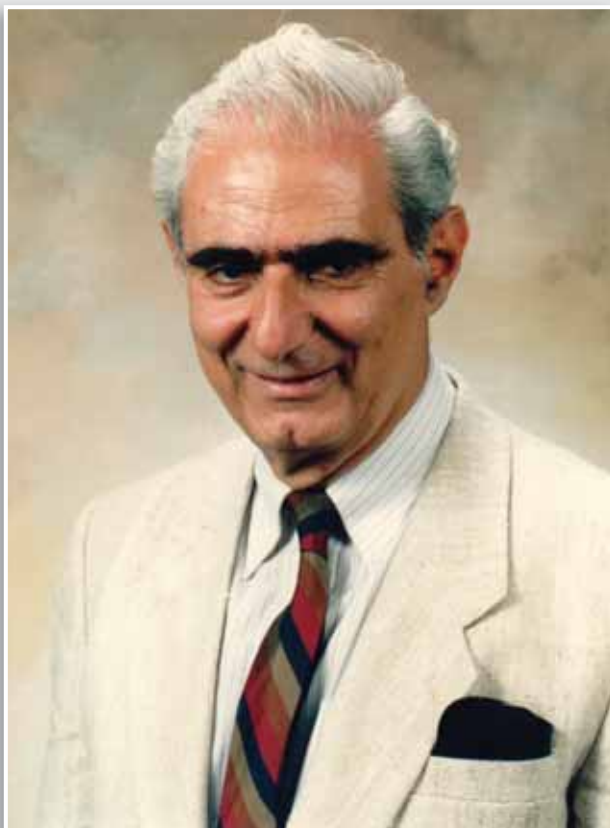
Senior M. Div. student, Aram Babajanyan, on top of all his study load and field work, offered to renovate the parquet floor of the Student Lounge. Coming from a family which specializes in this type of work, Aram skillfully executed the work in the semester break, receiving some help from fellow students. At a very minimal cost of material, the Seminary was able to renew its Lounge thanks to the dedication of Aram.



Before and after!

Thank You, Aram!

In Memoriam



Raja Hajjar
(1928-2017)

Raja Hajjar, longtime friend, neighbor and supporter of N.E.S.T., passed away on Saturday March 11, 2017. Raja remained active and full of life and energy until the last moments of his life. He hardly missed a public function at N.E.S.T., especially the Public Lectures and the Christian-Muslim dialogue events. He always had encouraging words for the Seminary and its activities; he was truly a believer in the mission of this institution. The completion of the large Auditorium which is named after him and his wife Grace is but one testimony to his generous support. N.E.S.T. lost a true and faithful friend!

In a ceremony honoring him at the National Evangelical Church in Beirut a couple of years ago, Raja summed up his life quoting Peter in the Gospel of Luke 5:5, 'Master... at Your word I will let down the nets' and saying: "because I relied on Jesus' word, my life was full of blessings and graces.... And now, in the autumn years of my life, I will rest on His word."

*"The eternal God is your dwelling place,
and underneath are the everlasting arms"*

(Deut. 33:27)

Raja is survived by his wife Grace, his daughters Mona and Leila and his son Ramzi.

We continue to depend on your prayers and support. Our ministry is indeed your ministry. You can continue to support us in any of the following ways:

• **Through the PC (USA)**

Make your checks payable to: Presbyterian Church (USA)
Indicate on your check: For deposit to ECO 862612 (N.E.S.T., Beirut)
Mail your contribution to: Presbyterian Church (USA)
P.O. Box 643700 Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700

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..

• **Direct checks in the name of N.E.S.T.:**

Near East School of Theology
P.O. Box 13-5780 Chouran
Beirut 1102-2070
Lebanon

• **Bank wire transfers:**

Byblos Bank, Bliss Branch - Beirut, Lebanon
Account Name: Near East School of Theology
Byblos Bank Swift Code: BYBALBBX
Account #: 475-2100883-008 for Dollars Transfers
Account #: 475-2100883-009 for Euro Transfers
IBAN: LB43003900000004752100883008 for Dollars Transfers
LB16003900000004752100883009 for Euro Transfer

• **Through: Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**

Send check to:

Dr. *Peter E. Makari* Executive, *Middle East and Europe*
Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
700 Prospect Ave., #718, Cleveland, Ohio 44115 USA
Designate the gift for NEST in the Memo line

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Near East School of Theology
P.O. Box 13-5780 Chouran
Beirut 1102-2070
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