

From the President

An Olive Tree for NEST

Visitors to NEST will find that there is a newly planted olive tree at the entrance of the building. The tree is a gift from the local committee of the Women's World Day of Prayer (WDP). In gratitude and appreciation for many years of holding the annual service of the WDP in the Large Chapel of the Seminary, the local Committee donated and planted an olive tree on February 27, 2018. NEST has been hosting the event for over 25 years. In my words of thanks to the WDP Committee I highlighted the long history that binds NEST to this international prayer event, and how NEST is a natural home for this *ecumenical* event that is led and done by *women*. "Ecumenical" and "women" are two concerns and themes that are at the heart of the mission of NEST. The Seminary has been a pioneer in founding and promoting ecumenical cooperation and institutions; it participates actively in all ecumenical activities, and it teaches in an ecumenical and

inclusive manner. And NEST has been a major supporter of women's causes and issues: it had the first woman pastor and professor (the Late Rev. Elsa Farr), the first woman Seminary president in the Middle East (Dr. Mary Mikhael); half of its full time faculty today are women; it has the highest ratio of female to male students among all seminaries in the Middle East; and the first two Middle Eastern women who were ordained last year are alumnae of NEST.

It is indeed most appropriate and very symbolic to decorate the entrance to NEST with an olive tree - a rich and profound biblical symbol. The olive tree and its branches signify "peace" in the Bible, especially in the Genesis story of the flood. But olive trees are also associated with prayer, for it was on the Mount of Olives that Jesus prayed.

An olive tree, symbolizing Peace and Prayer, welcomes and leads you into our Seminary!



Public Lectures 2017/18

The monthly Public Lectures dealt with a variety of topics:



December 14, 2017

“Mysteries of the Hebrew Bible Unlocked by Arabic”

Mr. Tony Nawfal

Publisher, Independent Researcher



January 18, 2018

“Christians of the Arab East: Present Apprehensions and Future Questions”

Dr. Tarek Mitri

Director, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs, American University of Beirut



February 15, 2018

“B.C.W. : The Only Women’s College: The Legacy of the American Presbyterian Mission in Lebanon”

Ms. Catherine Batruni

Doctoral Candidate, Department of History and Archaeology, American University of Beirut



April 19, 2018

“Is Ibn Taymiyya the Spiritual Father of ISIS and al-Qa’eda?”

Dr. Jon Hoover

School of Humanities, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Nottingham, U.K.



May 17, 2018

“Lies, Sex and Politicians: Communicating the Old Testament in Contemporary Culture”

The Rev. Dr. John Holdsworth

Anglican Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf, Executive Archdeacon in Cyprus, Chaplain, St. Helena’s, Larnaca

Resource Center for Christian Education



TEENOLOGY 502 was held on January 20, 2018. This training is part of a series that the Center has been organizing since the beginning of its trainings for youth leaders. It was attended by 23 leaders who came from different churches, schools, fellowships and social organizations. The two main topics were: “Transformational and Transactional Leadership” and “Building Christian Character in Teens”.

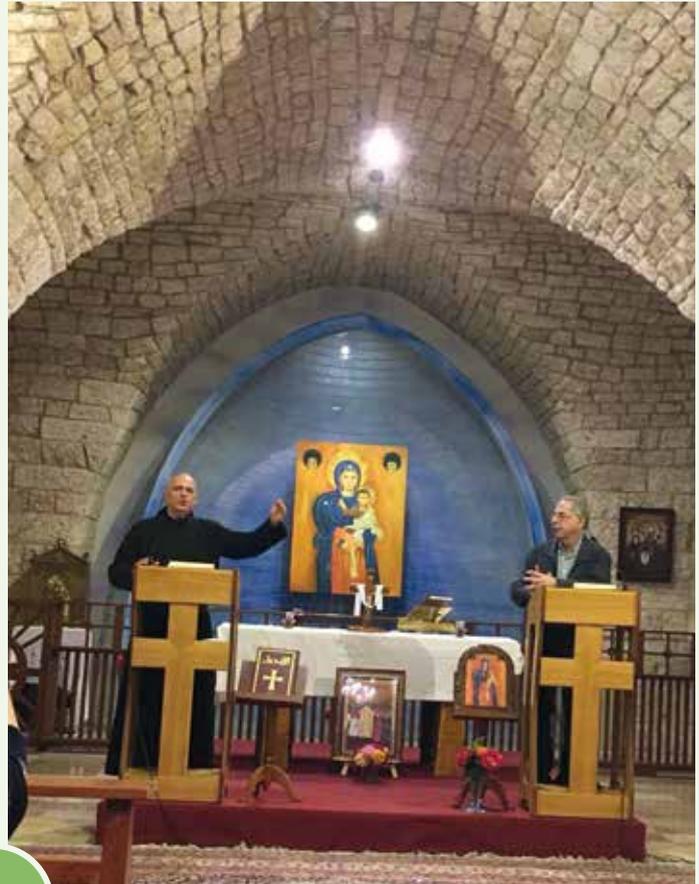
Both sessions were led by the special guest speaker Mr. Bob Moffet, an experienced youth leadership trainer and author of many books on the subject.

Resource Center



Spring Trip/Retreat

The annual Spring One-Day Retreat took place on May 5, 2018. It consisted of a one-day trip to the northern district of Batroun. Thirty students and faculty members took part. The trip started in the village of Haqel where a fossil museum was visited, then the group visited the monasteries of Mayfouq and St. Ilije, where they were given explanations about the history of Christian Maronite presence and work in those regions. The last part of the trip consisted of a walk in the Cedar forest of Tannourine that also included worship, singing and fellowship.



Visit to Moacdieh Center



A week before Easter, around 15 NEST students organized a visit to the neighboring Moacdieh Center – a home for assisted living for elderly people run by the National Evangelical Church of Beirut. The visit started with an opening prayer offered by the chairperson of the Student Association; it was followed by a musical game. The Spiritual Life Committee then led all in a structured liturgy with hymns, scripture readings, a reflection and prayers. This was followed by games prepared by the students' Social Life committee after which the students took instant photos with each one of the Moacdieh residents which they could keep as a souvenir. To close, the students offered the Center a handmade inspirational art work featuring the NEST logo and a verse from the Bible.



Forum of Christian-Muslim Thought



The Forum held a dialogue session on the topic “Is There a Moderate Islam and an Extremist Islam?” on March 1, 2018. Sheikh Shafiq Jiradi, Head of an Islamic Study and Research Center, lectured on the topic, and Dr. George Sabra engaged him in discussion questions, then the floor was opened to the audience to participate with their questions and comments.

NEST Faculty Member on LAU Board



In September, 2018, Dr. Johnny Awwad, Associate Professor of New Testament, was elected as the representative of the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon on the Board of Trustees of the Lebanese American University for a term of three years.

Dr. Nasrallah lectures in Göttingen

Dr. Rima Nasrallah van Saane, Assistant Professor of Practical Theology, was invited to lecture and lead a seminar at the University of Göttingen, Germany, from 23-27 January 2018. She gave two public lectures: “The Image of Mary in the Lebanese Context” and “Contemporary Issues in the Study of Eastern Christianity”. Both lectures were later filmed in a studio for future use. In addition, she led a seminar for a diverse group of students in the Intercultural Theology program with Professor Martin Tamcke.





N.E.S.T.-E.T.S.C. Consultation



The full-time faculty of NEST met with five visiting members of the faculty of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo (ETSC) in a consultation held at NEST from January 29-31, 2018. Consultations between the two seminaries have taken place in the past, and this year's meeting was a continuation of a longstanding relationship. ETSC President Atef Gendy Mehanny led the group from Egypt. The two faculties exchanged information about the current situation of each seminary, then discussed themes around short papers prepared by the participants. "Teaching Theology in the Middle East Today", "Challenges of Teaching Islam in Today's Middle Eastern Countries" and "Balancing Theological Education and Spiritual Formation" were prominent areas of discussion.

Possible areas of cooperation and mutual enrichment, as well as joint projects between the two faculties were also discussed. Two joint projects were agreed upon and put forward for further discussion and implementation: publishing the late Kenneth Bailey's articles on New Testament topics in Arabic, and working together on producing a lexicon of Arabic theological terms that could serve as a high-quality reference work.

The Consultation also included occasions for fellowship and a social and archeological outing, where both faculties went on a day-trip to Tyre to visit the historical and archeological sites of the city.

It was agreed to continue the joint meetings next year. ETSC invited the NEST faculty to meet in Cairo in January 2019.

Seminary Sundays

In its regular efforts to introduce its work and recruit students, NEST visits a number of church congregations every spring. This year groups of faculty and students participated in the worship of the following churches:

● April 29:



Majdalouna (and Jmayliyyeh) Presbyterian Church

● May 13:



Evangelical Church in Tripoli

● May 20:



Armenian Evangelical Church in Anjar



All Saints Episcopal Arabic Congregation, Beirut



Evangelical Church in Minyara, Akkar region

Faculty Publications in 2017/18

Peter Ford

- “Martin Luther’s Polemic against Islam: Are There Positive Lessons for Christians Today?” *Theological Review* 38 (2017): 148-166.

Rima Nasrallah van Saane

- “Worship and Spirituality” in: *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*. Edited by Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros, Todd M. Johnson. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 201.
- “Mission - Religion - Values... in a Fragmented World Mission as Connection”, in Riley Edwards-Raudonat, Uwe Gräbe, Kerstin Neumann (Editors), *Mission in Solidarity - Life in Abundance for All*, Beiträge zur Missionswissenschaft/Interkulturelle Theologie. Herausgegeben von Dieter Becker und Henning Wrogemann Band 41, LIT, 2017, pp. 21-32.
- “La Mission et L’éducation des Femmes Libanaises: Une étude historique sur un aspect spécifique des missions Protestantes, ...sa réussites et ses questionnements”, in *Le Levant*, Morgenland, 3 December 2017, pp. 12-14.

George Sabra

- Edited and Introduced the Arabic translation: *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin. Arabic. 2 volumes. Beirut: NEST and DMAH Publications, 2017.
- “The Protestant Reformation in the Middle East: Present Situation and Future Outlook”. *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 67, 2017, 112-128.
- “La Réforme Protestante au Moyen Orient: Situation actuelle et perspectives futures”. *Le Levant*. Dec. 2017, no. 106, pp. 4-6.
- “Theology” in: *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*. Edited by Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros, Todd M. Johnson. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp. 325-334.

President Sabra to receive E. H. Johnson Award

The Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC) has announced that “the recipient of the E. H. Johnson Award at the **2018 General Assembly** will be Dr. George Sabra, Professor of Systematic Theology and President of the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut, Lebanon.” The award is given in recognition of Cutting Edge Work in Mission. The announcement of the PCC stated:

In the Middle East, Dr. Sabra is recognized as a theological, teacher, preacher and church leader. He brings clarity, openness, faithfulness and a concern for the truth and for the future of theological education in the Middle Eastern region. NEST seeks to be a center for interaction and formation of evangelical thought, in order to further the role of the church in society. To that end, it engages in reflection, research and discussion concerning issues of peace, justice, human rights, interreligious dialogue and the environment.

Dr. Sabra has promoted Muslim-Christian dialogue for many years and will be speaking on the rise and acceptance of political and religious extremism as one of the more urgent matters before the church today.”



Visitors

● Presbyterian Church of Ireland

The Rev. Uel Marrs, Global Mission Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, visited NEST along with a small group from PCI on January 16. NEST and PCI have a longstanding relationship, and the meeting was an occasion to discuss further the present and future relationship of the two institutions.



● ABTS Students at

NEST

On February 2, Dr. Martin Accad, Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, brought a group of students from their master's program in order to listen to a lecture given by President Sabra on the history of the Protestant churches in the region and their role in the ecumenical movement.



● Danish Deans

The Lutheran Bishop of Haderslev (Denmark) Marianne Christiansen, along with 9 Deans from her diocese, visited NEST on March 6 as part of a study visit to Lebanon. They listened to Dr. Sabra who introduced NEST and its ministry in this part of the world, with special emphasis on its role in Christian-Muslim Relations and Dialogue within the context of Lebanon and the region.

● Church of Hannover

A delegation from the Church of Hannover, consisting of school principals and pastors, and headed by Rev. Rainer Kiefer, visited NEST on February 14, in order to learn about the work of the Seminary, especially about the Pastors Sabbatical program that NEST organizes biannually.



Visitors

● Münster Study Seminar

A study seminar consisting of twelve students and three professors from the German University of Münster visited the Seminary on March 19. As part of their program to become acquainted with “Christian-Muslim Relations in Lebanon”, they listened to a presentation by Dr. George Sabra on “Christian Muslim Dialogue in Lebanon and the Experience of NEST’s Forum of Christian-Muslim Thought.” The group later had lunch at our cafeteria and met with some students and faculty members.



● Pastors from Armenia

Rev. M. Melkonian, along with 4 pastors from the Evangelical Church in Armenia, visited the seminary on March 16. The purpose of the visit was to introduce the pastors to the work of NEST and to explore the possibility of sending a candidate for the Master of Divinity from the Armenian Church.

● Syria-Lebanon Partnership Network

A delegation of 5 persons from the Syria-Lebanon Partnership Network in the PCUSA, accompanied by Rev. Elmarie Parker, PCUSA Regional Liaison to Iraq, Syria, & Lebanon, visited the seminary on April 25 and had a session with President Sabra on the impact of the Syrian crisis on Christians in the region and specifically on the work of NEST.



● First Presbyterian Church in Atlanta

On May 16, 2018, seven members of the First Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, GA, accompanied by Rev. Elmarie Parker, spent half a day at NEST, attending two study sessions on “Christian-Muslim Relations in Lebanon” and “Survey of the Eastern Church” with Profs. Peter Ford and Rima Nasrallah van Saane respectively. President Sabra later introduced NEST and its ministry, then all participated in Chapel and had lunch together with students and faculty members.

Launching Calvin's *Institutes* in Egypt



After the successful launching of the first Arabic edition of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* at NEST in November 2017, Dr. G. Sabra, Editor of the work, travelled to Egypt on January 12, 2018 with the co-publishers, Dar Manhal al-Hayat (DMAH), to launch the book there. At an official ceremony in

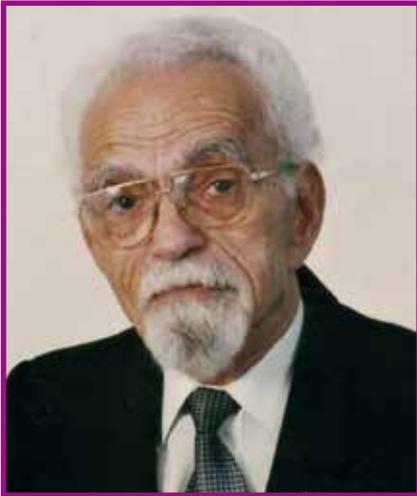
the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, the *Institutes* was launched with an introductory lecture given by Dr. Sabra. The first printing has already been sold out; NEST and DMAH are planning to reprint the two volumes both in Lebanon and Egypt.

Book Donation for Students



The Reformed Mission League in the Netherlands (GZB) donated a sum of money to be used for purchasing theological books for building up the libraries of candidates for the ministry at NEST. Nine full time Middle Eastern students benefitted from this gift; they chose major textbooks, commentaries and reference works in consultation with faculty members. The books were given to them in a short ceremony in the library of the Seminary

In Memoriam



Apraham Sarkissian
(1930 – 2017)

The **Rev. Apraham Sarkissian**, alumnus of NEST (B.D. 1970), passed away on Tuesday, December 12, 2017, after a brief illness.

The Rev. A. Sarkissian began his Christian ministry as a member of the Christian Endeavor Union in Lebanon. Leaving his customary work, he pursued his seminary education, whereupon completion he received the title of Licensed Preacher from the U.A.E.C.N.E. He served for many years in the Armenian Evangelical College (Beirut) as the school chaplain. He was ordained by the U.A.E.C.N.E. in 1979, and began his pastoral work in the Emmanuel Armenian Evangelical Church of Nor Amanos. After a brief term of service there, Rev. Sarkissian was invited to pastor the Armenian Evangelical Church of Nor Marash, and remained in that position until his retirement in 1999.

He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Takouhi (Khatcherian) Sarkissian; his children, Rev. & Mrs. Hagop Sarkissian, Mr. & Mrs. Sumpad Sarkissian, Mr. & Mrs. Khatchig Sarkissian, Mr. & Mrs. Zaven & Frieda (Sarkissian) Kouzarian.

We are grateful to God for the life of his servant as well as his ministry, and we commend Rev. A. Sarkissian's relatives to the comfort of God for the sure hope of eternal life.



Dorothea Vorländer
(1940-2018)

Dr. Dorothea Vorländer, former professor of Church History at NEST, passed away on the seventeenth of January earlier this year. She had served as professor of Church History for four years: 1972-1976. Not only was she a well-loved teacher, but she was also a devoted friend and supporter of NEST who continued to promote and support the Seminary from the time of her leaving Lebanon until shortly before her death. She was instrumental in setting up the Studies in the Middle East (SiMO) program, and she worked tirelessly for its success. NEST has lost a true and most supportive friend!

Her husband, Dr. Hermann Vorländer, who was also on the faculty of NEST teaching Old Testament communicated to NEST that an offering was collected in her memory, and the proceeds have been sent to NEST for purchase of books for the library in the field of Church History, especially for books on the history of churches in the Middle East.

*Our sincerest condolences and profoundest thanks
to Dr. Hermann and the family!*

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:

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Designate the gift for NEST in the Memo line

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