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NEST

NEWSLETTER

نشرة موسمية
تصدر عن



June 2019

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

Charge to the Graduates



There is a report, conducted and published annually by the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and a well-known global consumer insight firm that ranks countries. Thousands of people taken from over 80 countries are asked to respond to questions on the basis of 65 country attributes, e.g., economic influence, power, citizenship and quality of life, in order to determine each country's success as a modern nation. The rankings are part of an analysis project called the "Best Countries Report." In 2018, last year, and for the second year in a row, Switzerland ranked as the world's best country, followed by Canada, Sweden, Germany, United Kingdom, Japan, Sweden, Australia, United States, France, Netherlands. Nowhere on the list can any country from the Middle East be found; actually, there is no ranking for them. There is also such a thing as a research analysis report on the best country to raise children in: Denmark ranks first here, then Sweden, Norway, Finland, Canada... Again, no Middle Eastern country is anywhere in sight.

If you check the report about the Safest Countries in the world – there is such a report that lists 31 countries – you will find that Iceland ranks first, and Latvia and Spain rank 31 and 30, but no Middle Eastern country is anywhere in between or even in sight.

Dear graduates, you all come from the Middle East, from Syria, born and raised, but also from Lebanon, where you have lived and studied. Well, neither Syria nor Lebanon figure anywhere among the best countries of the world, nor among the best to raise your children in, nor among the safest countries to live in. It is very likely that they rank somewhere at the very end of such listings. Yet, it is in these countries, at the very end of every list, that you live, have studied theology, and where you will continue to live and work. A different type of report, the Holy Scriptures, tells us that it is precisely in this region of the world that is

farthest of all from the best country to be, that God chose to reveal Himself; it is in this region of the world that God formed a people and chose to accompany them; it is this region of the world that God chose for his Son to be born and to be raised in, in order to fulfill God's mission to the whole world.

You have been trained in what is not the best countries in the world; you have been spiritually formed and theologically shaped in what is not the best countries to be raised in; and you will be serving in very unsafe countries, but your theological training and spiritual formation are the best and most excellent, not because of the grades you got, or the seminary that you studied in, or the degrees you have acquired, but in so far as you will serve and dedicate your lives to precisely the countries that are not the best in the world, not the most children-raising friendly, and not the safest.

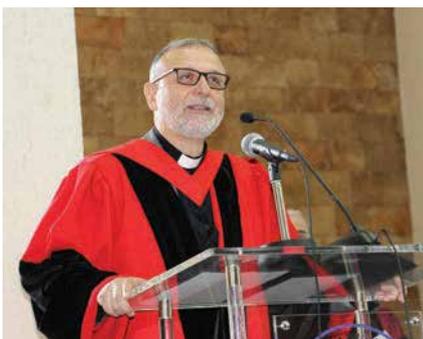
For our part, as a theological seminary, we measure our success in theological education, not simply by our academic standards and qualified teaching staff, or the number of volumes we have in our library, or the use of the latest technology in learning tools, but most importantly by whether those who study here remain to serve and persevere in what are not the best places to be, and so identify with, support, console, encourage, lead and minister to their brothers and sisters in those places which the world reports scorn and ranks last, but which figured first on God's list.

So, congratulations, dear graduates, not just because you received your degrees and finished your studies successfully, but because you will also put your education to use, and you will minister and serve, where it is most needed in this world-forsaken, but not God-forsaken, region. May that great declaration of faithfulness and steadfastness of the prophet Habakuk be your guiding light and your graduation motto:

*“Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines,
though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food,
though the flock is cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will exult in the God of my salvation.
GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
and makes me tread upon the heights.” (Hab 3:17-19)*

Commencement 2019

The 87th Commencement was held on June 15 in the Large Chapel. Four students graduated – all Syrians. The speaker was the Rev. Dr. Nadim Nassar (B. Th. '88), Director of the Awareness Foundation in the



Rev. Dr. Nadim Nassar

United Kingdom - a Christian Foundation whose mission is to empower people of faith to embrace diversity and build peaceful and harmonious communities. His address was entitled: “The Christians of the Middle East – God's Healing Hands”. The Commencement was attended by the President of the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Community of Syria and Lebanon, Rev. Joseph Kassab, as well the Honorary President of the Council, Rev. Dr. Salim Sahiouny, President of Haigazian University, Rev. Dr. Paul Haidostian, Board Members as well as students, family and relatives of the graduates, and friends of N.E.S.T.

Public Lectures 2018/2019

A series of Public Lectures were held throughout the academic year. All lectures are now available on the N.E.S.T. website: (www.theonest.edu.lb)

December 13, 2018



“Is There Really a Contradiction between Faith and Reason?”

Sigurd Baark, Ph. D.
Associate Researcher,
Faculty of Theology,
University of Copenhagen.

March 21, 2019



“John the Baptist and Jesus in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls”

Katell Berthelot
Professor, Centre national
de la recherche scientifique (CNRS)
Maison Méditerranéenne
des Sciences de l'Homme,
Aix-Marseille University

January 17, 2019



“Friendship with God in a Secular Age”

John Vissers
Principal, Professor of
Historical Theology
Knox College, Toronto



April 11, 2019

Panel Discussion of Prof. Mouchir Aoun’s book
Le Christ arabe

Participants:

Rev. Dr. Wilbert van Saane, Dr. Martin Accad,
Rev. Dr. Issa Diab

February 21, 2019



“For God and al-Watan: Lebanese Women Authors, Activists, and Preachers in the Nineteenth-Century Nahda”

Deanna Ferree Womack
Assistant Professor of
History of Religions and
Multifaith Relations,

Candler School of Theology, Emory University

May 23, 2019



“Paul’s Letters: The Archaeology of their First Recipients and the Responsibility of their Modern Readers”

Laura Nasrallah
Professor of New
Testament and
Early Christianity,
Harvard Divinity
School

Farewell Sermon of Shaké Geotcherian Jackson

The Seminary's traditional Holy Week and Easter Service was an occasion to hear a farewell sermon from Mrs. Shaké Geotcherian Jackson, Instructor for Christian Education and Director of the Christian Education Resource Center (CERC), who is leaving N.E.S.T. and Lebanon at the end of this academic year to join her husband, Paul David Jackson, in England. Shaké joined the faculty in 2008, and has since organized tens of activities, workshops and seminars for Lebanese and Middle Eastern churches. She also supervised and coordinated the Pastors Sabbatical Program for the last 11 years, helped in the production of the N.E.S.T. Newsletter, served on the Spiritual Life committee and contributed in many ways to the life of the Seminary. The N.E.S.T. community is sad to see her go, but we wish her God's blessings on her new life with her husband in the United Kingdom.



Mrs. Shaké Geotcherian

Spring Retreat and Cedar Tree Planting



At Abeih

The annual Spring Trip/Retreat took place after the end of the academic year on Tuesday June 11. Thirty-five members of the N.E.S.T. community – students, faculty members and some guests - went on a one-day trip to the village of Abeih in the Aleih district. The main aim was to visit the place where the Theological Seminary (predecessor of N.E.S.T.) was founded in the spring of 1869, and so to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Theological Seminary in Lebanon. Dr. Sabra introduced the place and gave a brief history of the beginnings of the Theological Seminary in Abeih; Rev. H. Badr then explained the plans of the National Evangelical Church of Beirut for renovating the place and setting up a vocational school there.



Around the cedar tree

Then all took part in prayers, singing and reflections on the mission of a theological seminary. After lunch, the group drove up to the Barouk Cedar reserve where a cedar tree was adopted in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Seminary.

Resource Center

The Youth Leaders Training Seminar under the theme **TEENOLOGY 601**, which is the 11th session organized by the Resource Center since its founding, took place on Saturday, June 1, 2019. Twenty-five persons from different churches, fellowships and social organizations participated. This year's topics were:

A. Awareness Training: What



Teenology 601

should we know about sexual abuse and how it would help us be aware of such issues during camps?

The session was presented by Rev. Hrayr Cholakian, pastor of the Armenian Evangelical First Church, Beirut, Lebanon.

B. Leading in Unity: Resolving conflict amongst leaders who are serving on the same team.

The session was presented by Rev. Bassem Melki, pastor of the Church of God in Ashrafieh, Beirut, Lebanon.

International Ecumenical Youth Meeting in Lebanon



Worship Service

Between March 22-26, 2019, an International Ecumenical Youth Meeting took place in Lebanon as a joint event between the Taizé Community in France and the Middle East Council of Churches. Around 1600 young men and women came from all over the Middle East and from many parts of the world to meet in Beirut and take part in prayers, worship, workshops, discussion groups, and inter-religious encounters.

All the churches of the region were represented. Professor Rev. Dr. Rima Nasrallah was a very prominent member of the main organizing committee, and many of the N.E.S.T. students took part in and also led many of the activities.



N.E.S.T. students at Taizé meeting

After the International Ecumenical Youth meeting ended, many participating groups expressed interest to visit N.E.S.T. and get more information on its Studies in the Middle East program. N.E.S.T. hosted the groups and introduced its programs:



Visit of Swedish Youth



Visit of Dutch Youth

Old Testament and the Jewish People Today

“What Do the Old Testament and Judaism Have to Do with Our Lives Today?” was the topic of discussions between faculty and students. The Student Spiritual Life Committee organized a whole afternoon of discussion on March 30, 2019. Two presentations launched the debate: the first was given by Dr. George Sabra on “The Old Testament and “Israel” in Middle Eastern Christian Theology”. The second was a lecture by Dr. Johnny Awwad on the interpretation of Romans 9-11 as relating to the church and its relation to the Jewish people.



Dr. Sabra



Dr. Awwad

Seminary Sundays

As has become customary every spring semester, groups of students and professors visit some local Protestant churches, leading worship and speaking about N.E.S.T. The churches visited in May were:



-National Evangelical Church in Hadath



-Emmanuel Armenian Evangelical Church (Dowra)



-Presbyterian Church in Sidon

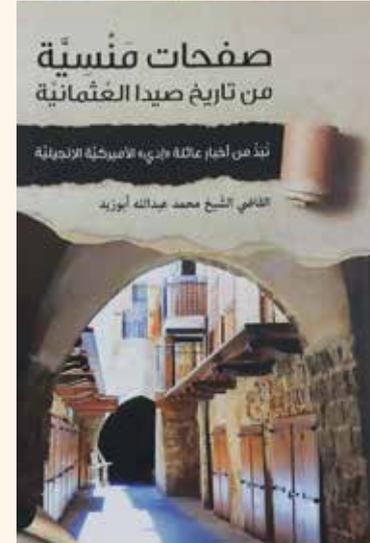


-Presbyterian Church in Rabieh

N.E.S.T. Publications



Sheikh M. Abou Zeid



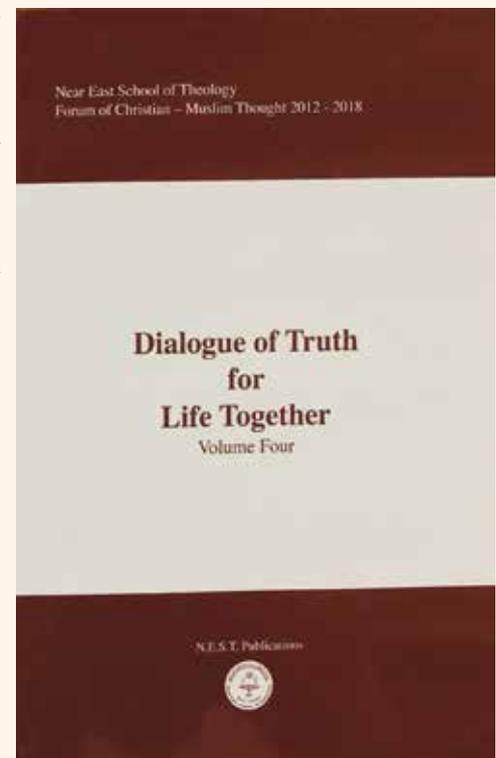
In this academic year 2018/2019, the Seminary published two books:

محمد أبو زيد، صفحات منسية من تاريخ صيدا العثمانية. نبد من أخبار عائلة "إدي" الإنجيلية الأميركية. المنصورية: منشورات كلية اللاهوت للشرق الأدنى ودار منهل الحياة، 2018.

[Mohammad Abou Zeid, *Forgotten Pages from Sidon's Ottoman History. Stories of the American Evangelical Eddy Family*]

Sheikh Mohammad Abou Zeid, the head of the Sidon Sunni Courts, wrote an objective and rather sympathetic account of the work and dedication of the Eddy American missionary family that lived and worked in Sidon for many generations. The Preserving Protestant Heritage Project at N.E.S.T. considered this work to be a valuable addition to its work, and it also viewed it as a testimony to Christian-Muslim relations, so N.E.S.T. decided to publish it under its name. Funds for printing and publication were given by Danmission. The launching was on Nov. 29, 2018, within the Public Lectures series.

Dialogue of Truth for Life Together. Volume 4 of the Papers of the "Forum for Christian-Muslim Thought" at the N.E.S.T., edited by N. Ma'amarbashi and George Sabra, was published in 2019. It has contributions in English, but it is mainly in Arabic.



Sixth N.E.S.T.-SiMO Consultation

Every two to three years, N.E.S.T. and the German Board of the Studies in the Middle East Program (SiMO) hold a consultation to discuss and evaluate the program, as well as to reflect on topics of common concern. This year, the sixth such consultation marked the 20th anniversary of the founding of the SiMO program, and it was hosted by Göttingen University. Six N.E.S.T. faculty members and seven students travelled to Germany on April 23rd. The Opening Session was held at the Faculty of Theology in the University of Göttingen with addresses delivered by the Dean of the Theological Faculty of Göttingen, the Rt. Rev. Ralf Meister, Bishop of the Evangelical Church of Hannover, President Sabra and Prof. Martin Tamcke, Chairperson of the SiMO Board in Germany.

The next three days were spent in a conference at a Coptic Orthodox Monastery in Höxter, just outside Göttingen. The theme of the conference was: “The Impact of the Current Political and Social Developments on the Witness of the Churches: A Time for Spiritual Rebuilding?” Altogether there were 56 participants – former SiMO students, German pastors who had been to N.E.S.T. in previous years, and other interested individuals. Three of our faculty members (Awwad, Nasrallah, Sabra) gave lectures, and several German speakers also contributed. N.E.S.T. students participated in the discussions and made a very good impression on those present.



At Göttingen University



Conference participants at Höxter

N.E.S.T.-Bochum Agreement of Exchange

On April 23, President Sabra and a delegation of faculty members and students from N.E.S.T. visited Bochum University, Germany, and signed a Memorandum of Understanding between N.E.S.T. and the faculty of Theology at the Ruhr University in Bochum. The agreement makes it possible for students from Bochum to take part in the Studies in the Middle East Program, as well as possible exchange of Faculty.



Pres. Sabra and Dean v. Bendemann



NEST delegation with Bochum faculty and students

Study Visits to N.E.S.T.

-Sixteen members from the Danish Lutheran Diocese of Aarhus came on a study trip to Lebanon from February 23-27, 2019. They visited N.E.S.T. on Feb. 25 and spent the day here listening to lectures, taking part in Chapel service and having lunch with faculty and students.



Aarhus Group

-Another group of 20 persons from Denmark – from the Diocese of Viborg – also conducting a study trip, visited N.E.S.T. on March 14, and attended lectures given by Dr. Sabra and Mrs. Goetcherian Jackson.



Viborg Diocese group



Tübingen group

-A group of theological students from Tübingen University, accompanied by former SiMO students, Susanne Goelz and Lotte Pommerer, spent the day at the Seminary on March 16, 2019. They listened to lectures given by Drs. Sabra and Ford, then had lunch and discussions with N.E.S.T. students.

Visitors

-Pastor Jean-Patrick Fanga, president of the Société Internationale de Théologie Pratique visited the Seminary along with Fr. Charbel Keyrouz, Kaslik University, and had discussions with Dr. Sabra as well as Dr. Rima Nasrallah about possible cooperation in the field of practical theology.



-Dr. Carlos Emilio Ham, President of Cuba Seminary visited N.E.S.T. on March 6. It was the first visit of the Cuban Seminary to N.E.S.T. Dr. Ham discussed with Dr. Sabra the possibility of exchange of students and professors.

-An official delegation from the Reformed Church of Hungary visited Lebanon in the last week of March, meeting with Protestant and other Christian leaders, as well as with government officials. On March 27, the delegation was hosted for lunch at N.E.S.T., accompanied by Rev. Joseph Kassab, President of the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Community in Syria and Lebanon. A meeting with the faculty followed lunch, and ways of collaboration with Hungarian Reformed seminaries and faculties of theology were discussed.



Visitors

-DanMission President, Bishop Peter Fischer-Moller, accompanied by his wife, General Secretary Mogens Kjaer and Mr. Ekkardt Sonntag, visited the Seminary and spoke in the chapel noon service on April 3, after conversation with President Sabra about furthering areas of cooperation between DanMission and N.E.S.T.



-A delegation from the Europe Steering Committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches visited N.E.S.T. on April 2, accompanied by the President of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, Rev. Najla Kassab. The delegation came on a solidarity visit with the Church in Syria and Lebanon and wanted to have a first-hand experience of the present situation.



President Martina Wasserloos-Strunk, Vice president Jenny Dober, Pres. Sabra, Rev. N. Kassab

ATIME Re-launched!

The Association of Theological Institutions in the Middle East which brings together 18 institutions of theological learning from the Protestant, Catholic, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches, held its first meeting in the Monastery of St. Augustine in Ain Sa'adeh, Lebanon after several years of inactivity. The meeting was called and attended by the General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches, Dr. Souraya Bishalany. For two days, the deans of the Seminaries discussed the ways of reviving cooperation and joint work. A new cabinet for the ATIME was elected: Chairperson: Fr. Taniouss Khalil, Sagesse Faculty of Theology; Executive Secretary, Fr. Edgar el-Haiby, Université St. Joseph, along with three other associate executive secretaries, one from each remaining family of churches.



N.E.S.T. President at ETSC Commencement

Dr. G. Sabra was invited to be the Commencement speaker at the 148th Commencement Exercises of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo on May 31, 2019. Twenty-six graduates received their diplomas in a ceremony in the Heliopolis Church. Dr. Sabra gave an address in Arabic on "The Contemporary Challenges of Theological Education".



Alumni News

Ordination of Reine Boghos

On Dec. 17, 2018, N.E.S.T. alumna Reine Boghos (B.Th./C.E., '01) was ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament by the Presbytery of Seaway-Glengarry in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. The service took place in Knox Presbytery Church in Morrisburg. Reine is now ministering to St. Timothy's Church in Ottawa. Along with her invitation letter to the N.E.S.T. community, Reine wrote the following:

"I am happy to send you below the invitation for my ordination. My experience at N.E.S.T. has shaped and impacted my journey in more than one way. It wouldn't have been possible to arrive to such a day without a place or community like N.E.S.T.'s. Thank you! I pray God continues to bless that wonderful place and people."



Congratulations Reine!

Installation of Aram Babajanyan

Aram Gor Babajanyan (M. Div. '17) was installed as pastor in the Armenian Evangelical Church, Gyumri, Armenia on September 16, 2018



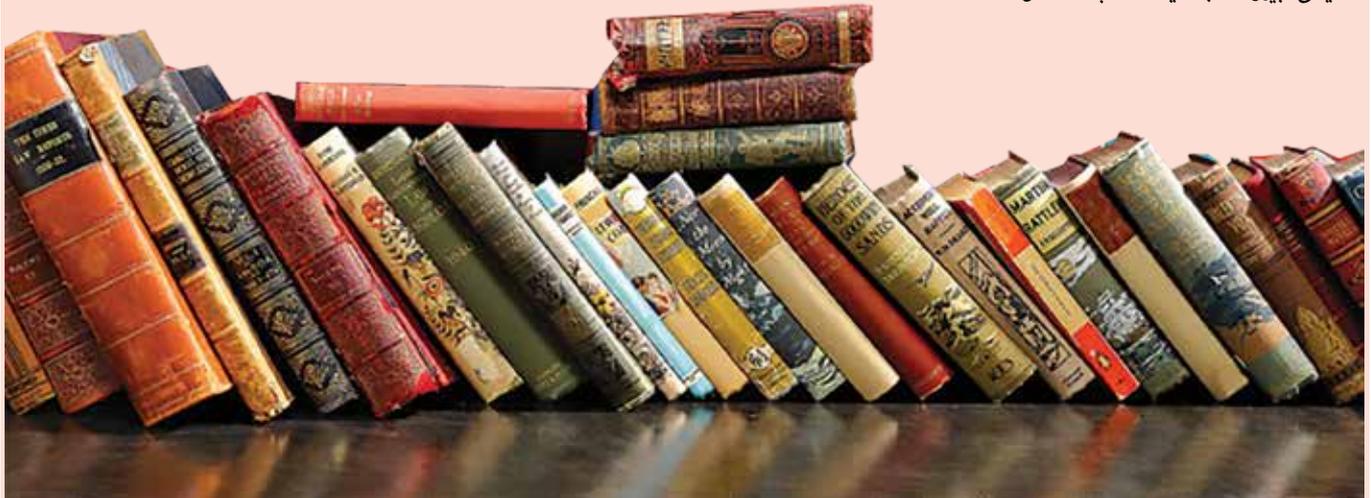
Rev. Hovsepian ('12), Rev. Melkonian ('84), Rev. Paytyan, A. Babajanyan ('17)

George Sabra, Professor of Systematic Theology

- “The Philosophy of Charles Malik: Fundamental Principles and Themes”. in: *On the Philosophical Thought of Charles Malik. Vol. I: Whitehead, Reason and Spirit*. Edited with an Introduction by H. Malik and T. Nasrallah. Louaize: Notre Dame University Press, 2018, pp. 3- 26.
- هكذا ترجم الكتاب المقدس إلى العربية. أعمال المؤتمر الدولي بمناسبة مرور ١٥٠ سنة على الترجمة الإنجيلية العربية للكتاب المقدس. بيروت: جمعية الكتاب المقدس، ٢٠١٨، ص ٢١-٥٣.
- “The Clash of Contexts” in: *The People of God in Bible and Tradition*. Ed. By Fr. Bassam Nassif and Michel Nseir. Balamand Theological Conferences 4. Balamand: St. John of Damascus Institute of Theology, 2018, pp. 169-177.
- *Dialogue of Truth for Life Together*. Vol 4. Papers of the Forum of Christian Muslim Thought at the Near East School of Theology: 2012-2018. Edited by Nabil Ma‘marbashi and George Sabra. Beirut: N.E.S.T. Publications, 2019.
- “Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Middle East: Tradition and the Exigencies of Context” *N.E.S.T. Theological Review vol. 40/1, 28-50*.

Johnny Awwad, Associate Professor of New Testament

- "رسالة بولس الرسول الى اهل غلاطية" في: التفسير العربي المعاصر للكتاب المقدس. تحرير اندريه زكي اسطفانوس (القاهرة: دار الثقافة، ٢٠١٨) ٢٢٣٠-٢٢٤٩.
- "رسالة بولس الرسول الأولى الى اهل تسالونيكي" في: التفسير العربي المعاصر للكتاب المقدس. ٢٢٨٧-٢٢٩٦.
- "رسالة بولس الرسول الثانية الى اهل تسالونيكي" في: التفسير العربي المعاصر للكتاب المقدس. ٢٢٩٧-٢٣٠٦.
- "الانجيل في المسيحية"، في حوار الحقيقة من اجل الحياة معا (المجلد الرابع). تحرير نبيل معمارباشي وجورج صبرا. بيروت: منشورات كلية اللاهوت للشرق الادنى، ٢٠١٨. ٥٣-٧٥.
- "إيمان يسوع في ترجمة البستاني-فاندايك"، في أعمال المؤتمر الدولي بمناسبة مرور ١٥٠ سنة على الترجمة الانجيلية العربية للكتاب المقدس. إعداد رنا عيسى. بيروت: جمعية الكتاب المقدس ، ٢٠١٨. ١٦٧-١٨٢.



In Memoriam



Ray Kiely (1918-2019)

N.E.S.T. would like pay tribute to the memory of Rev. Dr. Ray Kiely who passed away on February 9th, 2019 at the age of 99. Dr. Kiely served as Interim president of N.E.S.T. for two years (1983-85). Those were very difficult years for the country and the Seminary. Ray and Martha Kiely came to Lebanon to lead the Seminary at a time when the Lebanese themselves were fleeing their country due to the civil war. They set an example to all of us. They were devoted friends and supporters of the Seminary throughout their lives.

“Well done, thou good and faithful servant...Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Mt. 25:21)

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: 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*
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Account #: 475-2100883-008 for Dollars Transfers
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IBAN: LB43003900000004752100883008 for Dollars Transfers
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• 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..

• Thorough the Presbyterian Church in Canada (PCC)

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