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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



June 2020

P.O.Box: 13-5780 Chouran, Beirut 1102 2070 Lebanon • E-mail: president@theonest.edu.lb • Tel.: (961-1) 349901 / 738639 • Fax: (961-1) 347129

From the President

Hard Times ... and the Worst is Yet to Come?

This has been a most unusual and difficult academic year. It began against the background of wide popular protests in Lebanon against political corruption of the ruling class, witnessed the collapse of Lebanon's economy and its currency, and suffered the COVID-19 pandemic and its further disastrous consequences on the economy, as well as its negative impact on social and educational life. And all of this continues with no end in sight.

N.E.S.T. was able to carry on some of its normal activities, but many activities had to be cancelled or indefinitely postponed. We managed to salvage the academic year by turning to distance learning very early in the second semester. Although unprepared for it, our faculty devised various means to continue teaching. Only one or two classes continued physically on campus, but they were also being shared online with students who could not attend. Much is to be learnt from this experience of online education, and much is to be improved, but one thing it taught us is that distance learning is in no way a substitute for actual personal encounters, especially in an area of learning such as theology. No doubt we will be making use of online education more frequently now, and as soon as the Ministry of Education approves online education for the accredited degrees of Lebanese institutions of higher learning, we will work towards developing such programs. But we are not under the illusion that virtual teaching and learning is more fitting and more appropriate for theological education, ministerial training and spiritual formation than face to face encounters and the experience of being together in class and in a community life.

Meanwhile, the biggest challenge is the economic situation in Lebanon that is going from bad to worse. Many educational institutions, whether schools or universities, are facing extremely serious and existence-threatening conditions. Inability to pay tuition and other educational costs, severe restrictions on accessing money in banks, exorbitant rises in prices of food and all goods, the loss of value of the Lebanese lira towards the dollar and the dramatic decline in the purchasing power of the Lebanese currency - all these and other consequences of the crisis are affecting us at N.E.S.T. and encroaching on us in serious ways. N.E.S.T. has faced many crises in the past, but this is definitely one of the biggest.

We hope and trust in God above all to guide us and see us through, and we also rely on our friends, partners and supporters who have stood with us in various difficult times throughout our 151 years of existence to continue to do so.

Public Lectures

The monthly Public Lectures schedule which had been prepared for the whole academic year could not take place as planned. Only the first two lectures, originally planned for October and November were actually held in January and February.

January 16, 2020

Christianity on the Margins: The Case of Mormons

Donna Ray, Ph. D.

Visiting Professor, Near East School of Theology



February 13, 2020

**Sin, Business Ethics, and the Lebanese Thawra:
What the Church Can Say Now**

Professor Harry van Buren Visiting Professor, School of Business American University of Beirut



The Grace Chapel

After several postponements due to the uprising of October 17, N.E.S.T. was able to hold a service of inauguration and dedication of the newly renovated chapel in the name of Grace Saoud (1996-2018) on February 15, 2020. Grace, daughter of Rev. Suheil and Mangala Saoud, had passed away at the young age of 22 after three years of struggle with an incurable disease. She had been born at N.E.S.T. and lived all her life here, attending church and Sunday School, playing with other kids of her age, befriending students, singing in the Seminary choir...In short, N.E.S.T. was her home in every way. To honor her memory, N.E.S.T. and the Saoud family launched a campaign to renovate the large chapel and dedicate it in her name.



The Inauguration service was attended by around one hundred persons –relatives, friends, donors, Board members, students, faculty and staff of N.E.S.T. It consisted of prayers by the Revs. P. Haidostian, and M. Karagoezian, brief words by President Sabra and Mr. Richard Saoud, on behalf of the family, scriptural reading, hymns, and a musical offering – Variations on “Amazing Grace” - especially composed for the occasion by the Rev. Habib Badr. A reception followed.



Resource Center for Christian Education

In spite of the closures and interruptions and after many delays and postponements, the Resource Center for Christian Education, under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Lucy Dergarabedian, was able to organize two activities in the Anjar Armenian Evangelical School in January:

Teenology

To meet the challenges of the Lebanese political uncertainty, the Teenology training was focused on change, The Change That Starts from Within. The sessions were adapted from Franklin Covey's "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People". Thirty-six people attended.



The Joy of Sunday School XII

The presenter was the Rev. Dr. Lucy Dergarabedian. Sixteen individuals participated, some of whom were experienced teachers and others were new. The program consisted of two sessions: "Why Christian Education?" and "Creative Ways of Teaching". As a follow up, the trainees had to implement some of the creative methods the next day during Sunday School.



Visitors

First Presbyterian Church, Franklin, TN

A delegation from the First Presbyterian Church, Franklin, Tennessee, visited N.E.S.T. on January 20, accompanied by Rev. Elmarie Parker, PCUSA Regional Liaison to Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. The group attended three sessions given by three of our faculty members: Dr. G. Sabra on the work of N.E.S.T. and some perspectives on the current situation in Lebanon and the region; Dr. P. Ford on Islamic history and current work with Christian-Muslim Relations; and Dr. Rima Nasrallah on Middle Eastern Church history and the present situation.



The Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos

Pastor David Watermulder of the Congregation of the Presbyterian Church of Los Gatos, CA, visited N.E.S.T. on Jan. 31, 2020. Los Gatos has been a supporter of the Seminary for many years now, and it was the first visit by a member of its staff to N.E.S.T. Rev. Watermulder met with President Sabra, then was shown around the building.



Dr. Nasrallah lectures in Abu Dhabi

During the first week of February Dr. Rima Nasrallah was invited to address the annual Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf that was held in Abu Dhabi. She delivered four keynote addresses. The Synod's theme was discipleship in context, and it gathered over one hundred participants, clergy and partners from the area and beyond. In her addresses Nasrallah anchored discipleship in the movements of the liturgical year, rereading the context of this particular diocese with the themes of Advent, Ordinary Time, Lent and Pentecost.

Dr. Nasrallah's participation in the Synod comes as a consolidation of the bonds that are being forged between N.E.S.T. and the Anglican Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf, as we seek further connections in the field of theological education and formation.



Life in Lockdown

Two student perspectives



Shant Akoushian

(Lebanese, M. Div. senior student)

While many people around the world were stuck at home during the last few months, I spent my quarantine at N.E.S.T., which turned my second home during the last few years.

Life in quarantine was not easy for all of us at N.E.S.T. In the beginning we all were afraid, worried, and waiting for something to change, but after some time, we realized that although the world has stopped around us, we were stuck in a place which had its own world, and it never stops if there are students living there. Instead of spending quarantine with worries and fears, we made unforgettable memories with each other in our home, N.E.S.T., which made us feel different

members of one big family. Movie nights, playing board games, cooking together, and doing some sports were the best activities that we did in our free times. And, of course, I cannot forget when people everywhere were not able to go to their churches, how we did Sunday services in our chapel, and we even held a communion service, for we had the privilege of a pastor living with us in our home.

The unique world at N.E.S.T. was not only helpful with its rich social life, but also with its resources to those who wanted to learn, grow and discover new things. Spending the quarantine with one of the biggest and best theological libraries in Near East was another privilege of life at N.E.S.T. During these few months I also had the chance to discover more about the N.E.S.T. library which I didn't have enough time before, and doing this, helped me to grow and learn many new things parallel to my studies at N.E.S.T.

At the end, when I look back to my life in quarantine at N.E.S.T., I see that it wasn't a time that I lost part of my life, by being stuck in one place and waiting to go out, but it was a time in which I gained a lot and made unforgettable memories by having the chance to be in a world which never stops.



Dylan Forbes
(American, SiMO
student)

Not only was the entire world witnessing ground-breaking events during the spring of 2020 – pandemic, economic recession, political revolution – but the small world of N.E.S.T. saw many milestones come and go during the two-month COVID-19 lockdown. Several students and residents graduated with either their Bachelor’s or Master’s degrees. Many had birthdays. Nephews were born. Ash Wednesday, Lent, Easter Sunday, Earth Day, Ramadan, and Eid el Fitr passed. And those who stayed at N.E.S.T. celebrated them all together.



Communion Service



The Communion Table

These joys were accompanied, of course, by the woes of the age, and we were there not only to rejoice together but to grieve together. COVID-19 and economic recession proved stressful for us and devastating for many in Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and the United States. Protests broke out in many of our home countries, worry about COVID-19 and our elderly and at-risk family and community members plagued us, and most of us could not return home. In this time, the N.E.S.T. rooms, lounges, dining tables, and porches provided refuge from these anxieties – a place to process feelings, offer comfort, and distract ourselves with ping pong and volleyball games, movie nights, and karaoke. A place to learn from each other’s experiences and become more aware of our collective humanity in the face of chaos.



Cooking together!

N.E.S.T. during this time can be understood as a microcosm of what's going on outside – the fears, hopes, conflicts, loves. Needing to find a way forward, and somehow doing so. What a privilege it is to live together during this time.



Planting together!

STM Defense via Zoom

Rev. Mofid Karajili successfully defended his Master's thesis, "The Historical Jesus: Fulfiller or Greater than the Law?" on June 8, 2020. Mofid, a Syrian pastor residing in Homs, could not come to Beirut for the defense, thus it was held via zoom for the first time in the history of N.E.S.T.



Congratulations Rev. Mofid!

In Memoriam

“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” (Gal. 2:20)

Klaus Otte 1935-2020



K. Otte in 1985

Klaus Otte passed away on April 28, 2020 in Altenkirchen, Germany, and was buried after a small and private funeral rite. Prof. Otte came to Lebanon in the midst of the Lebanese war in 1985 to help out in the teaching of Systematic Theology. Although only here for a short time, he left a deep impression on his students. Many students found it difficult to concentrate on their theological studies in that time of war and chaos, but Klaus Otte's classes were very different from anything they had experienced. His original style of teaching and his warm manner of relating to students touched many and left a lasting impression. He is still remembered by many N.E.S.T. alumni as a friendly, kindhearted and open-minded and original teacher and thinker who cared for the whole person of his students and not just for their minds. Above all, N.E.S.T. remembers and honors him as the courageous man who came to Lebanon to serve and plant hope at a time when many Lebanese were themselves leaving their homeland in despair, and as a long term member of the Board of the Students in the M.E. program (SiMO) which has sent tens of German theology students to N.E.S.T. over the years.

May he rest in peace. Sincerest condolences to his 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:

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P.O. Box 643700 Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700

You will receive a receipt from the office in Louisville for your tax-deductible contribution.
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Near East School of Theology
P.O. Box 13-5780 Chouran
Beirut 1102-2070
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