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NEST NEWSLETTER

كلية ال 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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نشرة موسمية

تصدر عن



December 2020

From the President

“ ... for darkness is as light to you.” (Ps. 139:12)

Darkness covers us these days in Lebanon; the light around us has become night. Darkness has set upon us because of the COVID19 pandemic and the way it has transformed and damaged our personal, professional and social lives. The devastation and suffering resulting from the Beirut port explosion cast clouds of darkness over our capital city and over the lives of hundreds of thousands of killed, wounded and displaced people. The economic and financial collapse of the whole country has landed us in an abyss of darkness that engulfs everyone and everything. Our politicians seem to revel in their collusion with the powers of darkness, for they are not lifting a finger to do anything about the darkness that overwhelms the people. But the message of Christmas is that darkness does not have the last word, for “by the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death..” (Lk. 79-78 :1). We trust in the God to whom darkness is not dark and the night is as bright as the day. We hope in the God for whom darkness is as light, and so we continue with our lives and with our ministry of theological education and ministerial training in the midst and in spite of the darkness that encircles us. Our activities and events have been curtailed, as this short Newsletter shows, but we are still alive and witnessing.

Arise, shine; for your Light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you!

Merry Christmas to all our Friends and Partners

Opening Convocation

The Opening Convocation Service was held on the first day of classes (Sep. 28) at 12:00 pm, attended by students, faculty members, and staff. Due to the COVID19 situation, attendance was restricted to the residential community at NEST. President Sabra introduced new students and faculty, and gave a short address on the current situation at NEST and in the country of Lebanon, pointing out that 2019/2020 had been one of the most unusual and difficult years in the history of the Seminary. The economic and financial collapse of Lebanon, the COVID19 pandemic, and the Beirut Port explosion have adversely affected the Seminary. The current academic year is but a continuation of the three crises and their aftereffects on Lebanon and its people and institutions. But Sabra reaffirmed NEST's firm belief that "light will shine out of darkness", and he urged the Seminary community to have as their guiding thought for this academic year the words of St. Paul: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies." (II Cor 4:8-10)



Opening Convocation

New Faculty Member and Chaplain

Rev. Dr. Wilbert van Saane has joined the Faculty as Assistant Professor of Theology and Mission and also as Chaplain of the Seminary. Dr. van Saane is a Dutch citizen, who is married to Rev. Dr. Rima Nasrallah. He has been associated with Lebanon for over two decades, first as a visiting student at NEST in the late 1990s, then as the Pastor of the English-speaking congregation at the National Evangelical Church of Beirut, and also as a part-time Lecturer at NEST in previous years. Dr. van Saane received his doctorate in 2018 from the University of Utrecht, the Netherlands, with a dissertation on the topic: “Protestant Mission Partnerships: The Concept of Partnership in the History of the Netherlands Missionary Council in the Twentieth Century.”



Rev. Dr. Wilbert van Saane

Teaching under COVID19 Conditions

NEST began classes in person on September 28, 2020, at a time when most other universities were starting online. The small number of students and the fact that the majority of full-time students are boarders made it possible to teach on the premises. When a two-week lockdown was declared by the Lebanese Government in mid November, we shifted to online teaching until the end of

November, then resumed in-person classes. All persons at NEST have to wear masks, cleanse their hands regularly and observe social distancing in classes, library, cafeteria, and in all activities and events. Visitors to the building must also submit to temperature measurement.



Class in Session

Repairing the Seminary Building

The Beirut Port explosion on August 4, 2020 caused significant damage in the NEST building. The process of cleaning the debris and repairs started in August and is still going on. Most of the repairs have been completed. Here is a glimpse of some parts of the building before and after:



Student Lounge - Before



Student Lounge - After



Student Cafeteria - Before



Student Cafeteria - After



Faculty Office - Before



Faculty Office - After

French Protestant Congregation at NEST

Although NEST is applying strict measures concerning gatherings and visitors due to the COVID19 situation, the Administration could not refuse a request from the French Protestant congregation in Lebanon to use our premises for Sunday worship twice a month. The French congregation found itself with no place to worship during the pandemic, and so NEST opened its doors and welcomed its pastor and members to worship in the Bailey Chapel. Wearing of masks, washing of hands and temperature measuring are observed by all.



Visitors

In the time of corona, there is very little travel and hardly any visitors to the Seminary. One visitor and old friend of the institution and of the churches in Lebanon, however, dared to travel to Lebanon to hold interviews with church leaders and heads of institutions. Rev. Serge Fornerod, Director of External Relations of the Reformed Church of Switzerland, along with Ms. Tabea Stalder of HEKS, visited NEST on September 23, met with faculty and interviewed President Sabra about the situation of the Seminary after the Beirut port explosion and about how the Seminary is coping with COVID19.



L. Titizian, W. van Saane, R. Nasrallah, S. Fornerod, G. Sabra, P. Ford, Mrs. Ford, T. Stalder

In Memoriam

Sevag Trashian (M. Div. 2005) passed away suddenly on October 3, 2020. Sevag had not been suffering from any pre-existing heart conditions, and he was not being treated for any condition, but he seems to have succumbed to a massive heart attack. It was a shock to all who knew him.

Sevag was the pastor of the Armenian Evangelical Emmanuel Church in Beirut, and he was continuing his graduate studies at NEST in the STM program. The Near East School of Theology held a Memorial Service for him on November 2, 2020. Words were spoken by students, faculty, president and family member, Dr. Paul Haidostian.

His liveliness, dynamism, sense of humor and intellectual curiosity, but above all his dedication to the church and her Lord will be greatly missed by his family, his church, his seminary and all who knew him.

“My flesh and my heart may fail but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (Ps. 73:26)

Hrant Keshishian (B. Th. 2002). Hrant was pastor of the Armenian Evangelical Church of Plovdiv, Bulgaria. He passed away on 22 October 2020 at age 42, due to a cerebral hemorrhage. Having come to Beirut from the Melkonian Institute in Cyprus, Hrant, along with his brother Joseph, studied at NEST and took courses at Haigazian University.

Our deepest condolences to the family, especially to Joseph, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit to the Union of Armenian Evangelical Churches of Bulgaria and their President, Rev. Bedros Altunian.



Sevag Trashian 1978 - 2020



Hrant Keshishian 1978 - 2020

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