



Pastoring in Times of War and Crisis

June 29 – July 3, 2015

Dear Friends and Partners in Christ,

The Near East School of Theology, as its mission states, is a theological institution of higher learning NEST supports churches and Christian believers of the Middle East and elsewhere to be faithful witnesses to God's truth revealed in Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, for the renewal of persons and the transformation of communities and societies.

The N.E.S.T. through the Christian Education Resource Center, C.E.R.C. (est. 2008) has been planning and organizing special training seminars for Lebanese, Iraqi and Syrian lay leaders to help, encourage and empower them to become better servants of the Lord. This year, the training events for the Iraqi and Syrian lay leaders was joined with the Continuing Education Seminar which is directed towards the N.E.S.T alumnae and which is held every year. Thus, with the help of our partners, The Outreach Foundation, we brought these two together under the title “Pastoring in Times of war and Crisis” due to the urgency and the need to help all those who are in leadership roles in these hard times that the Middle East is going through.



The aim of this seminar was to support all those who are ministering in the churches of Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, whether they are pastors or lay leaders, during these difficult days that our region is experiencing. The seminar program was divided into two parts. In the first part the focus was on those who were ministering, and the psychological and spiritual difficulties that they were going through and how to cope with the trauma that they and their congregations were facing. In the second part, the focus was on learning how to help others who were going through traumatic experiences in war situations.

Our two main speakers were the Rev. Dr. Alan Baroody, Interim Pastor of St. Andrew Presbyterian Church in Denton, Texas, USA, specialist in Family therapy and mental health counseling and has a long experience of working with those ministering in situations of war trauma and Rev. Dr. Laurie Kraus, coordinator of the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance program of the Presbyterian Church in the United States.



We also had four other sessions which were led by Dr. Rima Nasrallah van Saane on ‘*Telling our Church’s Story*’, Rev. Wilbert van Saane, on ‘*Contextual Reading of the Bible*’, Dr. George Sabra on ‘*God, Evil and Suffering*’ and a round table on the subject of ‘*Preaching faith, hope and love in times of war and crisis*’ by Revs. H. Jezrawi (Karkouk, Iraq), M. Karajaili (Homs, Syria) and S. Megerditchian (Aleppo, Syria). The participants had several occasions to present their own stories and their own interpretations of Biblical texts and stories.

We started and ended each day with worship which refreshed our souls and helped us to focus on God and realize yet again that we were not alone in the horrible times that we were experiencing in the Middle East. On the last day we had a final written and oral evaluation session after which we ended our seminar by communion service celebrated by Rev. Suhail Saoud.



Each night after dinner, there was a walk in Beirut and we also had a day out to the Shouf mountains to help our Iraqi and Syrian participants who were coming from areas of war and crisis to relax and be revived by the beautiful scenery of God's beautiful creation.



We had an average of 37 persons attending the seminar daily: 12 from Iraq, 10 from Syria, 2 from Jordan and the rest from Lebanon.

The training seminar was a blessing for all who participated and we want to share with you some of the reflections that our participants shared with us in the final evaluation session:

- *“This seminar helped me to become a better leader esp. I learned that I need to take care of myself as I am ministering to others otherwise I won’t be of much help if I am burnt out physically, psychologically and spiritually.”*
- *“This training helped me to learn how to help those who are going through traumatic experiences and are refugees in our midst.”*
- *“The sessions on ‘Reading the Bible Contextually’ and the ‘Psalms of War and Psalms of Peace’ were very helpful and enlightened us on how we can use the Bible as a source for dealing with trauma and crisis situations.”*
- *“This training helped me and encouraged me in my ministry.”*
- *“This training was very helpful for pastors serving in war context. It helped shed light on the psychological effects of war, to diagnose and find helpful ways to cope with the issues of compassion fatigue and burn outs.”*
- *“The topic of the seminar was relevant to our times and there were helpful points for my ministry and life.”*
- *“This seminar helped me to be able to understand and help refugees in a better way.”*
- *“The mixture of lay, non-theologically trained participants with alumni of the NEST had its advantages and disadvantages. It was good to meet people from other parts of the region and to have fellowship with them, but there was also a gap between the theologically trained and the lay participants. Perhaps it is better to separate the two groups in the future.”*

These were some of the main ideas presented in the evaluation session, and we feel that they are a fair representation of the impressions and reactions people had. It was felt very clearly by the organizers that the participants from Syria and Iraq found the presentations of Baroody and Kraus very helpful and relevant, whereas the Lebanese and Jordanians felt that it was helpful material but not very relevant to their contexts.

We can say that this training in its various parts was a blessing. We give special thanks to the Outreach Foundation, especially to Rev. Marilyn Borst and Rev. Nuhad Tohme for their efforts and support in making this training a reality.

May God bless you and keep you and may your every effort of help bring glory to God and fill everyone involved with hope.

The organizing team:

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