

# Near East School of Theology



Dear Friends and Partners,

As we begin the new 2025-26 academic year, I cannot but pause and feel a great sense of gratitude for the past year and for the many who have stood by NEST during this transition. Despite the challenges, we are deeply grateful for the blessings and growth that we have experienced as a community.

The start of the 2024-25 academic year, and of my tenure at NEST, brought with it a time of war and violent conflict where we witnessed mass displacement of families into the Hamra neighborhood, where NEST is located. Many students and faculty were forced to return to Armenia or to their home countries.

Yet, our teaching smoothly transitioned online and learning continued. For those who remained in Lebanon, the war period humbled us and brought us closer as we worked to keep the doors of the seminary open and in service to those around us.

With the announcement of the ceasefire by Christmas, students and faculty were able to return in early January. The NEST community pressed forward, with Dr. Rima Nasrallah van Saane taking on the role of academic dean last January. More recently, we were able to recruit new faculty into our team, Dr. Issa Diab as part-time Old Testament Professor and Ms. Hala Bitar joining us as full-time faculty and director of the revived Christian Education Resource Center (CERC).



Martin Accad, President



**Dr. Rima Nasrallah**



**Ms. Hala Bitar**



**Dr. Issa Diab**

The 2024 - 2025 academic year was also a time of reflection, planning, and dreaming, as we began to undertake the considerable task of designing our new 3-5-year strategic plan. Many of you, alumni and partners, graciously shared your time and insights during the numerous participatory focus group discussions organized locally, regionally, and internationally. We have gathered input and ideas on key areas of development and growth for NEST in the coming years. The final plan is expected before the end of the current academic year.

Last June, a 7-person delegation of faculty and students from NEST traveled for a week to Germany, joining our long-time partners and celebrating with them 25 years since the start of the SiMO program (Studies in the Middle East). SiMO is an immersion program for theology students from around the world, focused on learning about Eastern Christianity and Islam. If you're interested in Middle East realities, please write and ask us how you can join.

We were proud to graduate 5 students locally from our core accredited programs and 35 in Armenia from the Certificate in Biblical Studies and Christian Education. Our newest alumni join the exceptional cohort of leaders called to serve their church communities throughout the region and the world.



**NEST 2025 Commencement Ceremony**



**2025 Graduation in Armenia**



**Celebrating 25 years of SiMO**



During this past year, we also conducted important maintenance and renovation work on the NEST building, which is considered an important brutalist architectural landmark in Beirut (check out this interesting [article](#) and note especially the NEST building designed by Kevork Karajerjian – 1967- Hamra, Beirut).

Considerable waterproofing work was completed on the basement floors to preserve the structural integrity of the building. Our students were welcomed back to campus with a newly refurbished sports facility, and our library was upgraded and brightened up with new lighting and welcoming reading space.



**The Newly Refurbished Sports Facility**

This academic year, one of our priorities is to transition, at least partially, to solar energy to meet our electricity needs and reduce hefty fuel expenses (and toxic pollutants!) from our electricity generators.



**The Brightened Up Reading Room**





Early in September, we held our annual convocation service to celebrate the start of the new academic year. Our theme for this year is John 15: “abiding in the true vine and bearing fruit in challenging times.”

The photo below is of an Armenian stone cross, a *Khatchkar*, which I took during our trip to Armenia last month. The abundant vine around the cross reflects so nicely the idea of fruitfulness by being rooted in Christ.



The Armenian Stone Cross (*Khatchkar*)

We were proud and excited to welcome returning students, as well as an impressive cohort of new ones from Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan. Currently, we have over 20 students enrolled in NEST's core theology track. In addition, over 25 Lebanese and Syrian lay leaders have embarked this month of September on their final course for the Online Diploma in Theological Studies (ODTS).

Returning students shared this photo of themselves welcoming new colleagues with some of the best Lebanon has to offer – friendship, the shoreline and of course, good food!



Thank you for your generous and prayerful hearts for NEST, for our students, and for the churches of this region. Please share about NEST with your communities, and if you or others feel called to give financially, please contact me at [president@theonest.edu.lb](mailto:president@theonest.edu.lb) and we can facilitate your very kind support.

Yours prayerfully,

Martin Accad