

# Training church leaders to impact the Middle East



**Perry** lives with his family in Lebanon and serves at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary. Here he illustrates the importance of theological training and the impact it is having on the Middle Eastern church.

“I will never be the same again,” said Jabul\*, a Lebanese student, after explaining how he had forgiven his brother who had robbed him several years previously, and been reconciled to him. Jabul was also considering a change in lifestyle - he recognised his career pirating software and DVDs was not compatible with his Christian faith.

What prompted Jabul to so dramatically change his life? It wasn't an international speaker, or a sermon in Church, or even personal Bible study. The event that opened Jabul's eyes to a new way of living was a theology course in Christian ethics at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS), where MECO workers serve in Lebanon.

“That story shows that when people start to look at the world through theological lenses, it changes them,” says Perry, a MECO worker who taught the course.

Perry and his wife Karen both work at ABTS, having spent the last two decades in the Middle East, in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

Perry also directs ABTS' Educational Ministries Resource Centre. “It's a hub for strategically resourcing the church in the Middle East through leadership training, networking, providing online Arabic book translations, dramas and even children's songs on CD.”

*“The Church is growing and we need to keep up!”*

**Preparing effective leaders**  
ABTS is in the hills above Beirut, in a predominantly Christian area. “It's a wonderful place to work,” says Perry. “I've been encouraged to develop creative approaches to theological education, helping people think through what we are actually trying to accomplish in theological education. Our aim is to prepare effective leaders to make an impact in churches and communities throughout the Middle East. It's very exciting!”

“The future of the church anywhere in the world depends on visionary, creative,

and godly leadership. The traditional Christian communities, including the Christian-background evangelical churches, are slowly declining in the Middle East. So, new believers, who come from non-Christian backgrounds are increasingly important - and they need theological education to help leaders emerge.

At ABTS, for example, we have students from Morocco to Iraq and from Syria to the Sudan, most of whom are already experienced Christian leaders. Our role is to sharpen their knowledge and skills, and to challenge them to go deeper in their walk with God.”

## Addressing the big questions

“We try to listen closely to the big questions our students face. In the West, students may be troubled by issues like evolutionary theory or the virgin birth. These aren't big issues in the Middle East - like most Christians, most Muslims believe in creation and the virgin birth. The big questions for church leaders here relate to integrity, discrimination and persecution - there's been an exodus of Christians from the region, and in some cultures polygamy and demon possession are key topics for discussion.

Prayer is always an essential element - and we would ask you to pray for us as we develop a new mission-focused curriculum and seek to raise up the church leaders of the future. The Church is growing and we need to keep up!”



## Did you know?

- In Lebanon about 35% of the population are Christians
- In Egypt they make up about 10%, in Jordan and Iraq about 5%
- Christians also comprise about 30% of the population of the Sudan
- The Church is rapidly growing in North Africa, with many new converts - more than the evangelical community in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine put together



Building strong leaders for the growing Middle Eastern Church



Future church leaders mentored at ABTS