

Providence Presbyterians Share Their Faith Throughout the World

Sharing your faith can be an intensely personal experience—but it can also be a community experience. The people of Providence Presbytery experience that regularly as we share our faith with people in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Armenia, Kenya, Germany and Denmark. Through our support of the Near East School of Theology, the people of Providence Presbytery are helping to train lay leaders and pastors from all over the world.



On September 23rd Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church hosted a dinner for people of Providence Presbytery who were interested in Middle Eastern Christians. At the event Dr. Mary Mikhael, President of the Near East School of Theology (NEST), spoke about the recent advances the school has made in ministry throughout the Middle East. NEST, an ecumenical theological seminary has trained the majority of of the religious workers in Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine in its pastoral degree programs.

Five years ago Providence Presbytery partnered with the school to develop its Educational Resource Center and program for Women's Studies. Since the opening of this facility, over 260 lay leaders have been trained in seminars and workshops. During one continuing education workshop led by a Princeton Seminary Calvin scholar, four elders were ordained and went back to Iraq to lead in their home churches.

The "Women for Peace" Seminar is designed to help women to affect the world by creating peace in their homes, churches and communities. This seminar, created for Iraqi women, hosts ten women at a time, and encourages them to sign a pledge for peace at the end of the seminar. After one seminar the ten women who had attended signed the pledge and went back to Iraq. The

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impact was so great that several weeks later a member of the Iraqi press contacted the school to find out more about this program.

Because of the openness of many people in the Middle East, Dr. Mikhael is hopeful about the future. The school's Christian/Muslim Discussion Forums are creating understanding among people. "Recognizing that all people, Christians and Muslims, are afraid of terrorism and desire a peaceful place to live, is just one way to build a better society," she says. The school has graduated fifty students from its Islam/Christian Relations Program. This one-year study for European students devotes one semester to Islamic history and the second to an immersion type program where students meet and interact with both Muslim and Christian leaders in Lebanon.

Mikhael encouraged Providence Presbytery attendees to improve Muslim/Christian relations in their own communities. "They (Islamic people) are our neighbors. They are with us in our work, schools, everywhere. As Christians, we have responsibility to be good neighbors. Trust is not always there. Muslims are also afraid of radicals. Reach out to Muslims who are open-minded. Everyone wants their children to have a future. Muslims are no different."

Primarily funded through church and denominational partnerships, NEST's budget has been affected by the recent global economic downturn. Most students have at least a fifty-percent scholarship, with many receiving as much as 100% tuition subsidization. The GLOCAL committee on behalf of Providence Presbytery presented Mikhael with a \$1,000 donation to help offset some of the budget deficit the school is experiencing. If you would like to contribute to NEST's ministry, you may give a check to your church's treasurer, or directly to "Providence Presbytery" --" for NEST" (515 Oakland Avenue, Rock Hill, SC 29730). On-line individual contributions can be made through the following site: <http://gamc.pcusa.org/donate/E862612/>.

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