



RCA Global Mission

2020 Year in Review



Peter and Patty Ford - Lebanon

The ongoing purpose of the Near East School of Theology (NEST) is to prepare committed Middle-Eastern Christian leaders to serve in pastoral and educational ministries in Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian congregations. The particular goal of 2020 was to maintain a quality theological education despite the many challenges facing Lebanon and NEST. Peter's role has been to provide courses and practical experience for students in how they can better understand their majority-Muslim context and build loving Christian relationships with their Muslim neighbors, which include striving for peaceful coexistence and bearing witness to their Christian faith. Patty's role has been to help students become fully acquainted with biblical content through Bible survey courses and to better utilize the resources of the seminary Library.

Blessings of 2020

NEST was able to stay mostly on schedule with its teaching, community worship, and some other events this year. [photos 1, 2] Several students completed their programs, even though NEST was not able to provide a commencement ceremony in 2020. Among these graduates, two Syrians stood out, having sensed God's call from profitable careers in medicine and dentistry into Christian ministry, with all its uncertainty regarding job security and remuneration.

In February 2020 (just before COVID-19 hit Lebanon), Peter was able to represent NEST at a major Christian seminar in Ghana, which honored the life of Prof. Lamin Sanneh, a long-standing friend of NEST. His presentation on "Muslim Minorities in Non-Muslim Lands" has since been published in the NEST professional journal. [photo 3]



NEST class and chapel during COVID-19

Ghana seminar honoring Lamin Sanneh

During the several lockdowns that we've experienced at NEST due to COVID-19 restrictions, we've enjoyed the creativity and commitment of the students who have worked hard to build up our in-residence community through various social and spiritual events. We've also learned of the concern among students and faculty to give of their time to help provide relief assistance needed during the current economic crisis. They also contributed to the clean-up following the major destruction from the August 4 blast (see more below).

Challenges of 2020

Like other schools and seminaries around the world, NEST had to adapt to the restrictions imposed by COVID-19. Teaching alternated between in-person classes (with appropriate precautions) and online instruction. Various seminars, forums, and other important activities (including commencement) had to be canceled or postponed. NEST has also been adversely affected by the failing economy in Lebanon, with its extremely high inflation rate. In addition, the huge blast at the Beirut port on August 4, 2020, caused considerable damage to the NEST building. By God's grace, and generous donations, NEST was able to complete virtually all repairs before the start in late September of the 2020-2021 academic year. Peter's office was one of the rooms severely affected; he was in the room at the moment of the blast, and again, by God's grace, he escaped any injury.



Preparing to pack relief assistance boxes in the NEST student lounge



Peter's office before, during, and after repairs.

How We Can Pray

Pray that the Lebanese government can overcome its political differences to find a suitable approach to the economic problems facing the country. Pray that more Middle East Christians will sense God's call into Christian ministry and be sent by their churches to NEST for training.

Thank You

We have been blessed by the cards and messages of encouragement and prayer from several prayer groups and individuals among our supporting churches—especially following the August 4 blast, and also following the passing into glory of Peter's mother in November.

Serving together,
Peter and Patty