



الخدمات اللوثرية العربية

ARABIC LUTHERAN MINISTRIES

End of 2019 Report

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

"We thank you for your support to our ministry. Through your generous support we are able carry on the mandate of our Lord to make disciples, by going, teaching and baptizing all nations."



**GREAT INDEED, WE CONFESS, IS THE MYSTERY OF
GODLINESS, GOD MANIFESTED IN THE FLESH.
1 TIMOTHY 3:16**

I was born in a small town in Northeast Syria, at the border with Turkey and Iraq. In 1986 I left my hometown and traveled 500 miles to enroll at Saint Ephraim Theological Seminary in Damascus. The seminary was across the street from the house of Ananias where Paul was baptized. We read in Acts 9:11, "The Lord said to Ananias: "Arise and go to the *street called straight* and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus." The straight street is the area where I spent my childhood and teenage years.

Syria is a Muslim-majority country, Christians being less than 10% of the population. Even in the Christian community there is diversity. Bab Touma is the name of the neighborhood where I grew up. It is the seat of three patriarchates, the Syrian Orthodox, the Greek Orthodox, and the Greek Catholic Churches. In addition to these global centers, there are local centers, these are, the Maronite Church, the Armenian Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, and the Presbyterian Church. Approximately two miles from these historical Christian neighborhoods, the Umayyad Mosque, also known as the Great Mosque of Damascus, stands.

Growing up in such a diverse multi-ethnic and multi-religious context, encounters with Muslims were spontaneous and daily. I knew from childhood that I was different; however, it was not enough to just feel different. I gradually realized that this difference implied that I had something to share with Muslims. I realized there were many challenges in building bridges and crossing over them to reach our Muslim friends and neighbors. Without a doubt, there are strong barriers between the banks of Islam and Christianity. The encounter between them is like the course of a river; in certain places the river is narrow, and the banks are close to each other, while in other areas, the gaps appear totally unbridgeable.

In this journey, I have studied and lived these challenges and have been encouraged to face them by learning about God who, in the Incarnation, broke in and built bridges with human beings. He did that by becoming one of them. God is different from us, but out of his love for us, he builds bridges with us in the person of Jesus Christ, and we become His children. When we look at the Incarnation, we know that the people of this world did not ask for it, and when Christ came, He was not accepted even by those who should have been prepared for his coming. God's love compelled him to do so, and the same love compels Christians to do likewise. God himself built the bridge to humanity. Just as Christ became a bridge between God and man and the channel through which the divine blessing flows, we must become bridges to our fellow men and channels through which the life-giving waters flow.

This is what our ministry has been doing for 15 years. We follow the steps of Jesus by building bridges with our Muslim friends both locally and globally through our Media Ministry.

We thank you for your support to our ministry. Through your generous support we are able to carry on the mandate of our Lord to make disciples, by going, teaching and baptizing all nations.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

Rev. Dr. Ajar Bahkou



INTRODUCING OUR NEW LOGO

As Arabic Lutheran Ministry expands locally and globally our board came to a unanimous decision to recreate our logo. This past October we were put in contact with Eric Gradberg who is a retired professional graphic designer, and a fourth-year seminary student at Concordia Lutheran Seminary in St Louis. After much work and many revisions, the logo was complete and adopted. The three leaves represent Luther's rose and our distinctive Lutheran identity. Instead of the traditional five leaves, we chose three to represent the Trinity. The Arabic word in the center is *Allah*, which means "God," the second Arabic word under it is *Mahabbah*, which means "Love." So, it reads "God is Love" (1 John 4:8). This represents our mission. As an LCMS Confessional ministry, we strive to contextualize our confession to Muslims and Arabs. We do this by reaching them with the Love of God that was revealed in its fullness in Jesus Christ.



GLOBAL IMPACT

The population of the Middle East and North Africa is around 317 Million, 93% of the population being Muslim. In many of those areas the Christian Church is scarce. But for the last 10-15 years and through International Satellites and various social Media platforms the Good News of the Gospel has been reaching areas that for over 1,400 years were closed to the Gospel. God is using these channels to transform lives for eternity. The Holy Spirit is calling and gathering a vast spectrum of viewers to Christ. Our media and publication ministry have been part of what God is doing to extend His Kingdom in the Arabic and the Islamic world.

These are but a few encouraging letters we received:

We thank the Lord for partnering with us for over one year. Your online teaching and preaching have been broadcasted on our *JC World TV* Channel on a regular basis. Our Channel has listeners all over the world, especially Islamic Countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. These countries are closed to the Gospel. The Bible is not even allowed in them, but through our Channel we are being able to penetrate these countries and impact millions all over the Islamic World.

Sample of your teachings <https://youtu.be/BdG6xvPCZwc>.

In our recent conversation you informed us about your plan to film a new discipleship program entitled *Life with God, Explaining the Foundation of Christian Faith*, which is in partnership with Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis. We have looked at the material in English and in Arabic and we are excited to broadcast this program on our Channel, once it is ready. As we have in the past year, we will allot 4 hours a week to broadcast your teaching, which will be 30 minutes a day. This time is subject to increasing in the future as the collaboration and partnership between us continues.

Dated: 06/07/2019

Arif Bhatti Founder/Producer

Jesus Christ World Television Network

Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate

Damascus / Syria 7/01/2019

Dear Father, it is with great honor and joy that we received 30 copies, free of charge, your discipleship curriculum, *Life With God*. The Department of Christian Education and Youth Ministry, at the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, will greatly benefit from it, we will use your curriculum at the various Bible studies and spiritual gatherings in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. We praise the Lord for the partnership between Arabic Lutheran Ministries and our Department. We look forward for further collaboration and partnership to spread the Gospel and extend Jesus' kingdom among Arabic speaking people locally and globally.

Bishop Antimus Jack Yakoub,

Patriarchal Vicar for Youth Affairs and Christian Education



LOCAL IMPACT

May 2019: Rev. Dr. Abjar Bahkou was the keynote speaker at the Annual dinner of the International Lutheran Students Ministry. Dr. Bahkou shared his journey to the Lutheran Church and his current ministry among Muslims and Arabs.



April 2019: Rev. Dr. Abjar Bahkou was the keynote speaker at the Annual Multi Ethic Symposium held at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis. Dr. Bahkou spoke about *the Message of the Gospel in the Culture Dominated by Shame and Honor*. To watch Dr. Bahkou's full lecture visit our YouTube channel,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-t5Q5EWQvzk&t=323s>

As we reach out to Arabs locally in Saint Louis, we build relationships with other Christian mission societies that work with refugees in Saint Louis. Our vice-president Rev. Dr. John Loum, and our Executive Director Rev. Dr. Abjar Bahkou attend and speak regularly at these monthly meetings



Our ministry began an ESL (English as a Second Language) program for Arab Immigrants in South Saint Louis at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Fenton. We thank the church for allowing us to use their facility. People from Iraq, Tunisia, and Afghanistan are attending these Friday ESL Classes.

October 2019: Rev. Dr. Bahkou led a one day Fall Lay Bible Institute about *Jesus in Islam*. Over 25 Christian Church workers from all over the Saint Louis Area attended the Seminar.



As part of the Seven-Week course on *Muslims and the Gospel*, Dr. Bahkou and Dr. Loum took a group of students to visit the Mosque and Islamic Foundation of Greater Saint Louis. The students interacted with the leaders of the Foundation and listened to their presentations.



Arabic ministry blessed in North Texas

In 2018, Rev. Dr. Abjar Bahkou took a call to serve as associate professor of Practical Theology at Concordia Seminary St. Louis, leaving the Arabic community of North Texas without a pastor. Pastor Bahkou has been traveling to Texas every two months to serve the needs of the community.

In April during Holy Week, Pastor Bahkou and his family drove to Fort Worth. The Arabic community gathered for worship on Good Friday (pictured above) and Easter at Peace Lutheran Church, Hurst. You can watch a promotional video of the services at youtu.be/w6oVbToyxsk.

In July, Pastor Bahkou and his family drove again to Fort Worth to hold services for the Arabic Community. On July 14, the community gathered for worship and in celebration of the Baptism of two immigrant children from Nineveh Valley, Iraq.

Thank you to all who continue to support Arabic Lutheran Ministry. It is through your generous donations and prayer that Pastor Bahkou and his family will continue to travel from St. Louis to Fort Worth to serve the Arabic community of North Texas.

For more information or to schedule a speaking engagement, send an email to bahkoua@csel.edu or visit ArabicLutheranMinistries.org.

If you would like to support the ministry to Arab immigrants in North Texas, please send donations or other correspondence to:

Arabic Lutheran Ministries
1565 Summer Chase Lane
Fenton, MO 63026



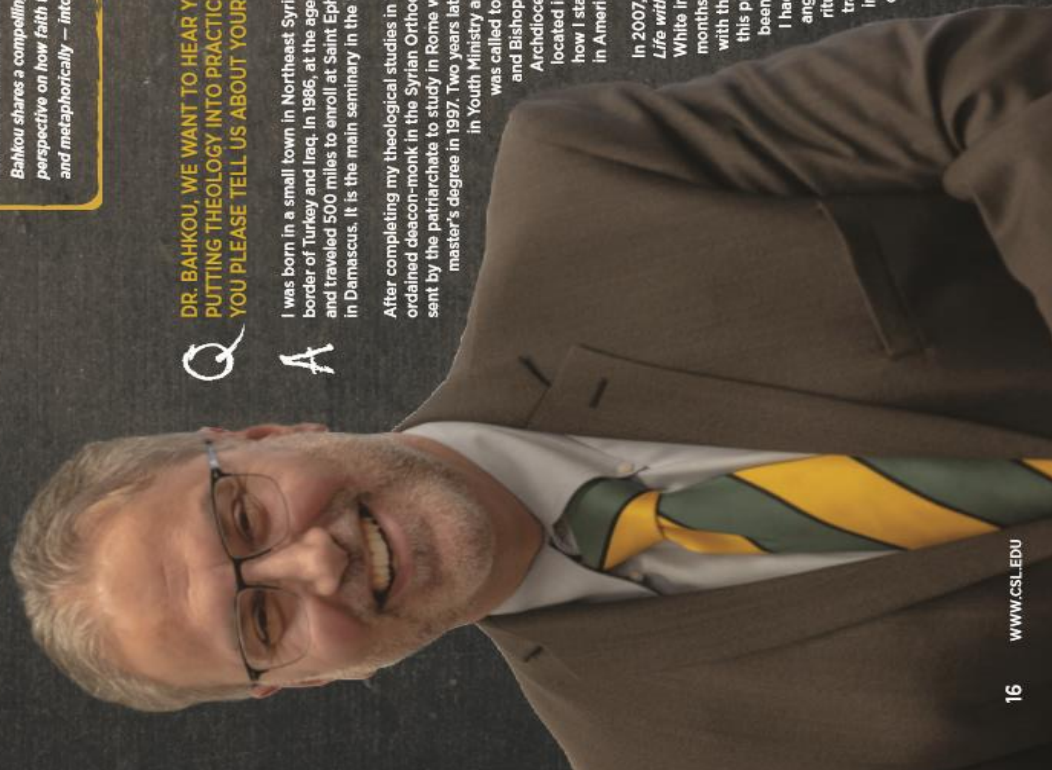
The Baptism of Daniel Farag was held July 14. Shown with Rev. Bahkou are, from left, Rame Suleiman (Godfather, holding Daniel), parents Roni and Einas Farag and Daniel's brother, Paul.



Daniel Kaky was baptized on July 14. From left, Ghader and Rana Kaky (parents), Noah Shamis (Godfather, holding Daniel). Siblings up front are Leonel and Mariel.

“GO AND LIVE!”

BY TRAVIS SCHOLL



A Conversation on Practical Faith with Dr. Agjar Bakhou

In today's digitally connected world, we are daily confronted with the plight of people around the globe and in our own backyard. Through social media, we encounter stories and photos of every kind of human suffering. The question of the hour is, "What are Christians doing to demonstrate the love of Jesus in a hurting world?" In other words: how are Christians walking their talk? The question is a daunting one, but it affords Christ-followers the opportunity to examine how we put our faith into practice.

With more than 15 years of experience building bridges between Christian and Muslim communities, Associate Professor of Practical Theology Dr. Agjar Bakhou shares a compelling, thoughtful and practical perspective on how faith translates — both literally and metaphorically — into meaningful action.

DR. BAKHOU, WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR THOUGHTS ON PUTTING THEOLOGY INTO PRACTICE. BUT FIRST, WOULD YOU PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND?

I was born in a small town in Northeast Syria called Al-Malkiyya at the border of Turkey and Iraq, in 1986, at the age of 14, I left my hometown and traveled 500 miles to enroll at Saint Ephraim Theological Seminary in Damascus. It is the main seminary in the Syrian Orthodox Church.

After completing my theological studies in 1993, I served as an ordained deacon-monk in the Syrian Orthodox Church. Next, I was sent by the patriarchate to study in Rome where I completed my master's degree in 1997. Two years later, I earned a doctorate in Youth Ministry and Catechesis. Then I was called to serve as youth pastor and Bishop Assistant to the Western Archdiocese of the United States, located in Burbank, Calif. This is how I started my life as a minister in America.

In 2007, I was asked to translate *Life with God* by Dr. Laurence L. White into Arabic. For over two months, I lived and interacted with this book. While working on this project, I realized that I had been living "under the law." I had been trying to please an angry God through man-made rituals, regulations and traditions. This project inspired me to become a certified pastor in The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod (LCMS).

WHAT ARE SOME "PRACTICAL" IMPLICATIONS OF SUCH GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE?

For the past 15 years, I have been involved in the field of evangelism among Muslims. The most common question I am asked is, "How can we reach out among our Muslim neighbors, coworkers and students?" I can tell you one thing for certain: No approach will work unless we take the initiative to become a neighbor to them — to tend to their needs and see where they are in their spiritual journey. Mission work is most effective when it meets the needs of the whole person, encompassing spiritual, emotional, physical, medical and educational areas. The Gospel of Christ is practical in this way. Its message heals and renews the heart of each person, and it also can heal and renew communities.

HOW DOES THEOLOGY HELP US ENCOUNTER AND SERVE A HURTING WORLD?

The biblical idea of the image as recorded in Gen. 1:26-27 helps us to see theology from a global perspective. God has created everything; the highest creation of God is man, for only man was created in God's image and likeness.

Based on this idea, as baptized children of God, we share a common humanity with all mankind. All human beings are created in God's image, and are seen as our neighbor, our fellow creatures and sufferers. Second, as children of God we proclaim to the world by our deeds and actions the gift God has given us through our Baptism, that is, we have been raised by God, through Jesus Christ, from spiritual death to spiritual life. Serving the world, full of death, encountering hurting people from different religions, ethnic and social backgrounds, is to share with them the joy and hope of being alive in Christ (Cf. 1 John 1: 1-2, 1 John 5: 11-12)

This is what we learn when we read Martin Luther's theology of the cross. Luther called it a "theology to live by," and he challenges us to "go and live it."

Dr. Travis Scholl is managing editor of Seminary Publications at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

YOUR WORK HAS GIVEN YOU A WINDOW NOT ONLY INTO CHRISTIANITY BUT OTHER WORLD RELIGIONS. WHAT DO NORTH AMERICAN CHRISTIANS NEED TO KNOW TO GIVE THEM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE?

The message of the Gospel never changed; Jesus commanded us to disciple and baptize all nations. The Lutheran Confessions remain the same anywhere we go. The challenge is translating the unchanging Gospel message into the "mother language" of the people with whom we are engaged.

Over the years, missionaries have gone to the mission field with a colonial mentality. They have imposed their own religious agendas on the people they wanted to reach without studying and respecting the culture they were in. Instead, we should be motivated by simply being with other people, learning their stories and sharing the story of Jesus with them. We need to let the Gospel convict the hearts of others. It is not our job to convert people. We are proclaimers. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts and converts hearts.

WHAT ROLE DOES THEOLOGY PLAY AS WE MOVE OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM?

We must remember that the words "mission" and "encounter" belong to each other. "Encounter" means a deliberate effort to engage genuinely and respectfully with another person. An encounter expresses a desire to relate to, communicate with and be understood by another person.

Whether in our neighborhoods and families or in a totally different cultural context, here are four practices that can help seminary students, pastors and all believers apply faith in encounters beyond the classroom:

1. Be committed to fostering good, neighborly relationships. Opening our homes to others goes a long way. So does practicing kindness in daily contact.
2. Practice serving others. Whether casual or professional, demonstrate a spirit of respect and love to others without discrimination.
3. Be ready to listen. Listening is a form of hospitality.
4. Be inviting. Christ invited people to follow Him. A real encounter cannot exclude such an invitation (provided that it fits with the spiritual climate of the encounter). This invitation must be extended respectfully, knowing that faith trusts in God and not to a particular group.



UPCOMING EVENTS

- December 2019: Pastor Bahkou and his family will travel to Texas to serve the needs of the Arabic community in North Texas. We will host Christmas services at Peace Lutheran Church in Hurst, TX.
- January 2020: Pastor Bahkou will be leading devotion and participating at the annual conference of Association of Lutheran Mission Agencies. ALMA is a professional development network for mission leaders in and around LCMS.

Contact Us

Arabic Lutheran Ministries

1565 Summer Chase Lane

Fenton, MO 63026

817-680-1794

lifewithgodalm@gmail.com

www.arabiclutheranministries.org

ARABIC LUTHERAN MINISTRIES

1565 Summer Chase Lane

Fenton, MO 63026