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LSESD MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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Nayla ecstatic about her moment in the spotlight

NIGHT TO SHINE

BY DANIELLA DAOU



Elie getting spruced up for the crowning

LET THEIR LIGHT SHINE

Fifty stars, fifty dreams, fifty chances for a bright future, if we only give them the right spotlight. Just like diamonds in the rough, young men and women with special needs are buried under mountains of neglect, shame, and social segregation, waiting for their light to be revealed and illuminate the world. In the midst of political paralysis, economic deterioration, and restless Lebanese streets, SKILD hosted its second annual Night to Shine in order to plant a seed of hope for youth with special needs and their parents. Amidst cheering crowds, they entered accompanied by their parents with smiles on their faces and twinkles in their eyes hiding a thousand tears and dreams broken by not being included in society at a younger age.

Celebrations began with pampering our special guests! Tens of volunteers gathered around the special guests to offer them make-up, hairdos, and shoe shining. The paparazzi did not leave our stars, grabbing every chance they could get to take their pictures in an effort to also catch their inner beauty.

As education and social affairs representatives mingled with the parents, the celebrities and special guests prepared themselves for the crowning ceremony. The special guests descended the stairs like royalty accompanied by their dates until they reached the end of the red carpet where a celebrity was waiting to crown them as kings and queens.

Night to Shine is an unforgettable opportunity to bring joy to the hearts of individuals with special needs and to remind them that they are royalty in God's eyes. However, it is also a reminder for us that they deserve to shine every day of the year, not just one night.

MANY THANKS TO SKILD!

"To the people organizing Night to Shine:

We thank you so much for your amazing work and for the precious opportunity that you granted our son Charbel. This night was a new and amazing experience for him. It planted joy in him, made his spirits soar and increased his confidence. The atmosphere was amazing. The smallest of details were a part of Charbel's joy: the red carpet, the dance, the dinner, and the attention. All these, plus our being there to share these beautiful moments with him, really made him feel like a king. The moment he came home he started telling everyone about all the details of his experience. We've never seen a celebration like this before and we haven't met people who embrace our children, give them affection, and treat them like their own, like you have. You have our deepest gratitude and thanks and may God reward you for everything you are doing."

-Charbel's Parents



"It was a wonderful night for our children!"

"I would like to thank you very much for your invitation to this wonderful party. Reem was very happy at this event with her friends. Thank you!"

-Reem's Parents



"Please accept our heart-felt gratitude for arranging the event, which was beyond our expectations. We will remember this event for a long time. Hiba's smile and happiness proved that the event "Night to Shine" made her very special. The SKILD team worked hard to succeed at this event. Thank you to the Tim Tebow Foundation!"

-Hiba's Father





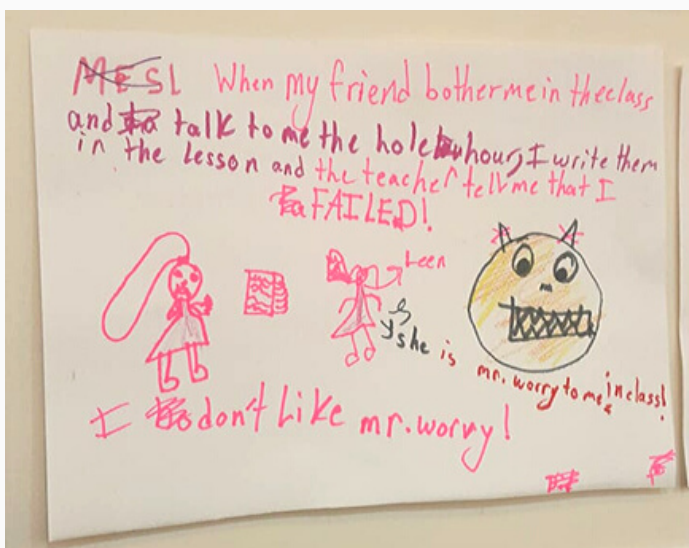
FAMILY TO GATHER

BY EMILY HOPPIN

ENCOURAGEMENT IN A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY AND ANXIETY

Having been encouraged by a friend to attend, on Saturday, January 11th Rana set off for the Family to Gather event that was taking place at the ABTS Moore Conference Center that day. Hoping to find support in the midst of the political and economic crisis happening in Lebanon and keep her family strong despite all of the uncertainty and anxiety it produced, she brought her husband, nursery-aged son, and 8-year-old daughter along with her. What happened for her family there, however, was beyond what she could have hoped for.

Over the previous month, Rana had noticed her daughter, Anna, having some trouble. She didn't understand what was wrong but thought the children's event might be helpful for her to take part in anyway. Guided by BCYM (Baptist Children and Youth Ministry) and BBS (Beirut Baptist School) staff members, Anna was instructed to draw a picture of a Mr. Worri (see photo) who represented her fears and anxieties. Her drawing spoke of a friend who had been bullying and distracting her in class. As an A+ student, Anna was struggling with anxiety that she would fail her class.



Anna draws her representation of Mr. Worri

In order to combat these fears, BCYM and BBS leaders taught the children to pray to Jesus whenever they felt afraid and He would be with them. Later, Anna shared with her mother what she had learned at the children's event, so Rana, discovering the reason for her daughter's anxiety, suggested that they pray for her friend, Leen, asking Jesus to make her a better person and to let them reconcile.

The following Tuesday, when Rana picked her daughter up from school, Anna exclaimed, "Mom, the most amazing thing happened today! Leen said, 'Let's not fight anymore. I want to make up with you. Let's play together during recess!'" The two girls have been playing together since.

For Rana's family, the Family to Gather event was very a fruitful experience. Now their mission is to find a Sunday school for Anna so that she can take part in these kinds of activities every week.

Rana's family was not the only family to be deeply impacted by the Family to Gather Event. One of LSESD's own employees, Dana Haidamous, was so encouraged by the training that she has started implementing the teachings at home with her own family. She shared that she has become more perceptive of her children's changes in behavior now that she knows the different ways that kids react to stress and has started trying to implement the techniques suggested to help kids deal with stress in trying times. She also stated, "My husband and I were so comforted to know that it's better to share with our kids and deal with the situation together through prayer and talks rather than shield them and leave them to deal with the situation from what they pick up in the house or outside." She is not alone. Many families learned practical techniques for improving communication within their own families and more positive ways of coping during stressful times.

The event hosted separate sessions for adults, teenagers, and children, each providing relevant, useful, and age-appropriate strategies for dealing with stress. Dr. Smyrna Khalaf and Pastor Bassem Melki from ABTS (Arab Baptist Theological Seminary) taught parents how to understand their children's perceptions of the world and reactions to stress. Emphasis was placed on letting children know their importance and not being afraid to show vulnerability in front of them; after all, Jesus is the ultimate superhero, not us. Bassem also highlighted the cultural sins that are a part of everyday Lebanese life such as: masking emotions, denial and lying; nagging, envy and gossip; and judgement along with a lack of grace and mercy.

Meanwhile, as a way to reach out to the younger population, a joint team comprised of YFC (Youth for Christ) and SKILD leaders guided teenagers through talking about anxiety and stress and provided them with coping skills such as relaxation breathing techniques.

What made the event a success was the combination of different age groups and the holistic approach of strengthening the whole family. Additionally, multiple Christian ministries united in this time of crisis to serve the Body of Christ.

A total of over 200 participants from 26 churches from across the evangelical spectrum attended the event, which served to draw family members closer together, open up communication lines, and teach them how to trust God in times of adversity.

COMBATTING ANXIETY TOGETHER



"It was a great blessing to my kids and us as family."





SHINING EVER BRIGHTER

BY ALIA ABOUD

STRENGTHENING THE CHURCH IN SYRIA

Strengthening the witness of the Church in the Arab World is the very reason we exist as LSESD. We made a decision to stand by the Church in Syria since the beginning of the war in 2011, and to date we continue to partner with around 25 churches that are deeply involved in responding to the needs of their people. Nine years into the war and God's transforming work continues both among the caregivers and the care-recipients. And despite the challenges all around, every trip to Syria leaves us more certain than before that we're on the right track – this is where we should be, and this is what we should be doing particularly as the needs in Syria today by far exceed the needs in previous years. In fact, the situation has deteriorated even further with the recent financial crisis in Lebanon.

Our trip to Syria the first week of February coincided with snowstorm Karim that hit both Lebanon and Syria and chilled families with temperatures as low as -3 to -5 degrees Celsius in the absence of heating options due to severe power outages and fuel shortages.

The Sunday morning service was at a partner church that does not have much space, yet the entrance of the church was lined up with 50+ chairs, almost in open air. Though trembling from the cold, they stayed and humbly worshipped their Creator.

One of the families we visited included a 29-year old mother and her 6 children. The husband was killed 5 years ago. Like a mother hen gathers her brood under her wings, Hanan* gathers her six children into a room that has a heater at the center. Originally operating on fuel, the heater now runs on pieces of wood that they pick-up off the streets. Highly dependent on the food parcel that she receives from the program, Hanan is keen on her children having an education. "My husband and I had huge dreams for them, and the dreams start with finishing school." She sends them off to school in the morning while she goes out in search of opportunities working as a cleaning lady. In the afternoon, when they're back from school, she sits with them and helps them with their studies. "They are very bright you know! All I need is a sewing machine! I can then work from home and earn our living without having to force my 14-year old to drop out of school. I can do it. I know how to."

Intrigued by the church's genuine care for her and her family, Hanan started sending her children to a nearby Sunday school: "I want them to have the same heart and learn to care for others as the Church people do".

Moving to another area and partner, we met with the leaders of a children's program that we started together some four years ago and that doubled in size last year as newly displaced families came to the area. Among the children were two boys who carried knives with them to church and were quite the bullies. Not wanting to lose them, the church leaders invested quality time in them, creating in the boys a sense of responsibility towards the younger children. Today, these same boys help the youth leaders in the program. They're not the only ones who have changed. Others have too! One mother shared that ever since her son started coming to the children's program he "is no longer the same. What did you do to him? He doesn't curse anymore, nor create problems for his siblings." Now that she herself comes to church she says, "Now I understand."

Among our partners in Syria is a center that has been operating for about a year now. It is both a Child Friendly Space (CFS) and a center for children with special needs (offering therapy and helping with integration). Together, the Center serves around 150 children with a range of disabilities such as Down's Syndrome, Autism, PTSD, ADHD, Hypoxia, Cerebral atrophy, and cerebral palsy. The center also welcomes other extreme cases that will be integrated with the other children in the center when they reach the same level as them.

We were fascinated by the heart and spirit of the team. The Center's team leader, himself a deacon at his church, identifies the tools his leaders need for the therapy sessions and prepares them himself. A mother of a child at the Center told us, "You know, I never thought of it before, but I want to come to know the Jesus who calls you to such a service."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: "The church is the church only when it exists for others." The Church in Syria and in Lebanon is learning what it means to exist for others, and in the process God is blessing both Church and community.

I don't know about you, but my heart is encouraged! Dear friends, kindly keep us in prayer as we stand steadfastly by the Church so that it may be salt and light in truly challenging times.

PROVIDING FOR THE NEEDS OF THE DISPLACED

**Play items
constructed
to help the
children
acquire
motor skills**



**"The church is the church only
when it exists for others."
-Dietrich Bonhoeffer**



NEW CABINET, SAME OLD STORY?

BY WISSAM NASRALLAH

For a city that has prided itself as one of the best destinations for nightlife in the Middle East, the battlefield-like scenes broadcasted on national TV over the weekend of January 18th – 19th and January 22nd were quite the change from the usual glitz and glamour of Beirut's party scene.

The smoke covering the air in Downtown Beirut was that of tear gas rather than the (in)famous lemon-mint flavored arguileh. On the menu were rubber bullets and water cannons instead of Shawarma and café Blanc.

After 90 days of relatively peaceful mass-antigovernment protests and a two-week long Christmas Truce, events suddenly took a violent turn capping what protesters have baptized the “week of anger”.

While many Lebanese condemn the use of violence, most share the same feelings of anger and frustration, feelings caused by the outrageous delay in forming a new government of experts especially given the extreme urgency of the economic and financial situation.

Many felt that the practice of bickering and bartering over ministerial portfolios while the country is spiraling downward into economic depression was, for many, indication that the only way forward is through escalation.

The voices of peaceful protesters, the loss of thousands of jobs, the fluctuating withdrawal policies of one's own savings at the bank and the devaluation of the Lebanese pound by almost 60% on the black market did not seem to be enough to shake the apathy and callousness of a corrupt and inept political class.



Cabinet as of January 21st, 2020

*"In a very short time, will not
Lebanon be turned into a fertile
field and the fertile field seem
like a forest?"*

-Isaiah 29:17

It seems that the country's bankruptcy is not only economic but also moral.

The quota-based confessional political system that has shaped Lebanese political life since independence in 1943 seems to have reached its limit. Indeed, the Lebanese consociational system, as political scientists call it, revolves around institutional power sharing arrangements between the eighteen official religious groups while ensuring each group's autonomy in the field of personal status law and education. In this system, coalition governments are the norm and they include leaders from all major segments of the Lebanese political scene. Each group enjoys some kind of a veto to the government's decisions making it necessary to find mutual agreements and create time-consuming consensus between the different groups.

Despite the civil war from 1975 to 1990, the system in place has mainly succeeded in ensuring plural political activity, in protecting religious minorities and in thwarting hegemonic temptations of certain communities.

However, consociationalism has failed to create a strong state with robust political institutions. Each community has had a patron that defends its own interests and ensures that it gets a piece of the rotting pie. This has led to unstable institutions, recurrent political deadlocks and poor governance especially in the absence of a formal political opposition necessary for effective scrutiny and oversight. The many ills this country is reeling from, namely corruption, nepotism and overt conflicts of interest, is a result of this decaying culture of governance.

This is one of the reasons why it has taken so long to form a new government since the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri on October 29th. Now that a new cabinet is formed, our duty is twofold: to pray for the newly appointed leaders, whether we like them or not, that they would have wisdom and govern with justice and a sense of urgency, but also, to be ready to speak up and exercise our right to peaceful protest whenever there is injustice and corruption. Perhaps we can yet transform Lebanon as God proclaimed in Isaiah 29:17 (see above).

Lebanese Uprising - A Timeline

Central Bank of Lebanon promises to provide dollars to companies importing wheat, gas, and pharmaceuticals.

October 1st



Union of Bakery owners threaten to strike in reaction to dollar shortage.

October 10th



125 wildfires break out and spread across country.

October 13th



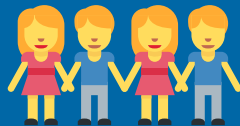
Proposal reversed. Protests shut down Lebanon, Hariri announces 72-hour deadline for reforms.

October 18th



Lebanese citizens form a 171 kilometer human chain across the country extending from north to south.

October 27th



Syndicate of Lebanese Bank Employees goes on strike, closing bank doors for two weeks.

November 11th



Lebanese Independence Day celebrated with first-ever civil parade.

November 22nd



New cabinet is formed

January 22nd

October 8th



Mill owners announce they will sell their products in dollars, not lira.

October 11th



Syndicate of Gas Station Owners go on strike as a result of dollar shortage.

October 17th



\$0.20 proposed tax on Whatsapp calls sparks nationwide protests. Public sector closes.

October 21st



Cabinet passes the 2020 state budget. Hariri announces reforms. Demonstrations resume.

October 29th



Hariri resigns, and cabinet is disbanded.

November 15th



Hospitals go on strike until they are paid by the government.

December 19th

Former Minister of Education Hassan Diab designated as prime minister.

Unrest continues...



Lebanese Uprising - Basic Facts

Many companies
have cut salaries
in half



National debt
at 150% GDP

Unemployment
rates rising



Inflation of basic
goods by at least
30%

Cash withdrawal limits
set at around
\$100-\$300/week



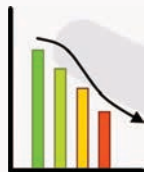
Devaluation of
the Lebanese
pound on the
black market by
40-60%

Wire transfers out of
the country prohibited



A series of
fathers have
committed
suicide

\$ 400 million in
losses to the
Lebanese state



166,000 individuals
have lost their jobs in
the past 3 months



Shortage of
medical supplies.
Hospital workers
go on strike due
to lack of
payment from the
government



A Journey Through the Beatitudes

BY WISSAM NASRALLAH

Even 2000 years after it was first taught by Jesus, the “Sermon on the Mount” is still revolutionary; it is a revolution not against the powers that be, but a revolution of the heart and mind. It represents what John Stott calls a manifesto, albeit a condensed one, for a “Christian counter-culture” that illustrates the way of life in the Kingdom of God. The same Kingdom Jesus was proclaiming in chapter 4 saying: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” v.17. Probably the most famous and beloved part of the Sermon on the Mount is the beatitudes. It provides the reader comfort and reassurance. However, there is much more to this passage than meets the eye.

Jesus is not talking about some sort of a spiritual comfort and a call to perseverance to those suffering or passing through a hard time. On the contrary, he is portraying the characteristics of those desiring to be His followers: poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers and persecuted.

“They are the characteristics of what every follower of Christ ought to be.”

“Say what?!” I agree, this seems to be very counterintuitive, and you might be wondering, as I was, how can this be? Can these possibly be the characteristics of the citizens of the Kingdom of God? What about the comfort, the inheritance, the mercy...? They are the result of God’s work in our life: they are the blessings. In our culture, to be blessed means to be happy. However, the term used in the text is more an exclamation of the inner joy and peace that results from being reconciled with God. And these blessings are given to us by grace rather than the result of any effort we might have made or the state we are in. As adopted members of God’s family, they are the privileges we can start enjoying today while the Holy Spirit works in us to shape our character into Christlikeness.

Finally, these eight characteristics come as a package instead of designating eight separate groups of peoples. They are the characteristics of what every follower of Christ ought to be. It is a new kind of law, one that is written on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33), hearts of flesh rather than of stone (Ezekiel 36:26).

As the Lebanese revolution continues to unfold, we will be undergoing our own inner revolution over the next few months as we unpack each beatitude. Will you join us?

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

–Matthew 5:3

UPCOMING EVENTS

FOR THE MONTHS OF FEBRUARY AND MARCH

FEBRUARY 14-15

KATALYST BEIRUT 2020

BCYM is participating in a Youth Conference organized by a network of Youth ministries in Lebanon featuring speaker Dr. Terry Linhart on the self-aware leader located at the Moore Conference Center & Guest House.

MARCH 6-8

TEACHERS SKILLS FORUM 2020 (JORDAN)

SKILD is presenting two sessions at the Teachers Skills Forum 2020 that is sponsored by the Queen Rania Academy in Amman, Jordan.

MARCH

LAUNCH OF KHEBZ W MELEH

The Institute of Middle East Studies' Khebz w Meleh peacebuilding initiative is set to be launched in March. The first group will bring together Christian and Muslim youth aged 14 to 17 from the Damour and Rmeileh areas located south of Beirut. The youth will build friendships and work for the common good of their communities.

Why Thimar?

The Arabic word 'thimar' means fruit, as in the fruit of one's labor and the fruits of the Spirit. Through this newsletter we would like to share with you some of the fruits of the different ministries God has entrusted us with. Our hope is that you will be encouraged and inspired to see some of the ways in which God is working in this part of the world and walk with us in keeping Jesus' command to "produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8). Thank you for your faithful support and prayers.

The Editorial Team

Why the New Look?

As the Communications team at LSESD, we decided that with the dawn of a new year it was time for our newsletter to have a facelift. However, we are open to hearing from you, our readers. Please take the time to respond to a short survey about our newsletter [here](#).

None of this would be possible if it weren't for you our faithful partners, friends and loyal supporters. ♥

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