

PRAYER & PRAISE

Quarterly news from Middle East Media

ISSUE 91 **JANUARY** 2016

STORIES OF 2015

Highlights from North Africa and the Gulf

PRAY FOR 2016

*Prayer requests from the field
for the coming year*

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Dear Friends,

One of the things that has struck me most about Middle East Media's work has been the wonderful creativity of our staff in the field. God is using their creative talents in amazing ways to communicate his love to his people, and they're also inspiring others to use media in their own creative ways for positive change.

When some of our UK team visited our North Africa office last October, they were told the inspiring story of a group of girls who put their MEM media training into practice.

These girls were desperate to attend a Christian youth conference but were from a very poor background and couldn't afford to attend. Using the media skills they'd learnt in one of our free media workshops, the girls decided to shoot the best films they could with the equipment they had.

With cheap mobile phones for film equipment and rocks and ladders for tripods, they created a simple short story, edited it, and sold it to everyone they could. After a few weeks, they'd raised enough money for all of them to attend the event!

Our trainer was beaming with pride as he told this story - he was one of the first people to encourage these girls to express their feelings and use their creativity.

In this edition of Prayer & Praise, you'll find more stories of creativity and transformation, as our teams in North Africa and the Gulf share their highlights from 2015 and plans for the coming year.

As the Middle East continues to change rapidly, **please pray for continued creativity and God's inspiration** as our field staff continue to meet the needs of their communities and nations in new and inspiring ways.

Speaking of change, **we've also given Prayer & Praise a brand new look,** with more space for stories, news and prayer requests. I hope you enjoy it and if you have any feedback, please get in touch!

As always, **thank you so much for your support** through your faithful giving, praying and interest in our work. I hope this Prayer & Praise will guide you in your prayers and encourage you with hope for the Middle East.



Emily Shurmer

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Thank you for your generosity!

*Thanks to all who donated at our 40th anniversary event in June. After costs, we raised over **£8000** to bless our team in North Africa. The donation arrived with them at a critical time of difficult financial challenges, and has enabled several important projects:*

Promotion for our charitable organisation, including a promotional gathering among schools and parents, and new promotional materials

A **1-day filmmaking course** which is being prepared for February, to offer media training to 20 deprived children from a slum area

A **1-minute pilot of a new animation idea** to pitch to TV stations. Pilots are vital for securing broadcasting slots and bringing in new animation work

A **team-building day by the sea**, including swimming, relaxing and team games. This was a much-needed time of encouragement, joy, unity and rest for the team after a difficult year

After a year of pay cuts, the staff were able to return to **full salaries.**

MEM in North Africa

2015 was an exceptionally difficult year for our team in North Africa, with simultaneous challenges of unrest, security concerns and financial pressure. But in the midst of this storm, God has been faithful. Here are just some of the highlights of His grace in action in 2015 and prayer requests for the coming year.

Writing to God

During the month of Ramadan, visitors to our Nisa'a women's website were invited to write their own messages to God to tell him whatever was on their hearts, regardless of their religious background.

Hundreds of women responded to the invitation. In their letters, women were crying out to God about pain, doubt, fear and anxiety, but also showed great gratitude. The staff were amazed by the enlightened perspective of God and his goodness that came through in these letters. They believe it shows the impact our website is having - Muslim women are encountering Christians, many of them for the first time, and are starting to realise they too can have a personal relationship with God.

The letter printed here was written by a young Muslim woman. She writes to God as a close friend, with humour, honesty and love. God is moving among the people of the Middle East, in ways we may never fully realise or understand.



Dear God,

How are you? There are people who would be surprised I'm speaking to you like this. I thought for a long time about what to write to you, and it's hard to find just one thing... Life is too big, God! What should I write?

I want to start with a thank you letter. Thank you for travelling, for love, for hope. For the gift I get from receiving an encouraging word. Thank you for the people you sent to stand by me when I was weak or broken, for the people whose pat on the back felt like it was you patting me on the back, and the whisper that said I must stand up and carry on.

I also need to write you an apology letter. We all need to apologize to you about the same thing - that we forget you, then raise our heads to heaven and ask, "Why are you so far away?" when really, it is us who walk far away from you. You are with us in every moment of our lives but we forget you in the crowdedness of work, life, friends and family.

You know what, God? I need to ask for forgiveness. Sometimes I didn't realize the value of people or things until I lost them. I didn't mean to neglect people when I was supposed to stand by them. I didn't mean to smile when really I was angry or crying inside. Please forgive me for living my life without you.

Thank you that you are my friend.

Highlights of 2015

5000 underprivileged children were shown two episodes of our Dreammaker series, in an effort to educate them about their self-worth, precious value and uniqueness.

We trained **24** young Church leaders in leadership and media skills as part of our Future Leaders project. They have produced **16** short videos as a result of the training, and some went on to lead **3** media camps for **80** children to pass on their knowledge.

400 new articles were written on our Nisa'a women's website, to educate, empower and inspire women of all backgrounds. The website has now had **70,000** viewers and **270,000** likes on Facebook.

WebTV has over **21,000** fans on Facebook. Through this online video channel, our team of local Arabic-speaking young people is creating inspirational media content for their peers. So far, they've created **36** productions on critical themes such as freedom of choice and HIV/AIDS, with many more planned for 2016.

24 local charitable organisations including our social arm have formed an alliance, and will be using our media kit to raise awareness on human trafficking, particularly the forced early marriage of girls.



Pray for our North Africa team:

- ▶ **For financial security.** The team is suffering from a severe lack of funding, exacerbated by two lengthy court cases. Staff have been laid off, others have taken pay cuts, and certain projects haven't been able to go ahead. Please pray for the floodgates to open and for funding to be secured.
- ▶ **For the wide distribution of our programmes,** that they would serve endless sister organisations around the world, and would reach millions of unreached Arabic speakers.
- ▶ **For heavenly protection of our team** in the region, for their safety, wisdom and discernment in difficult times.
- ▶ **For encouragement, joy, peace and unity** among team members as they head into another year, particularly after the difficulties of 2015.
- ▶ **For revelation of what is on God's heart** in the coming years for this region, so we can fill any strategic gaps God calls us to fill and join in his plan.
- ▶ **For new horizons of creativity,** to continually think outside the box and find new ways to reach out to people.



MEM in the Gulf

Our Gulf team have been blessed with financial provision this year, which has enabled them to undertake a couple of major projects among local youth and women. Here, they share their highlights of 2015.

We have been assisting a young Muslim director in filming a documentary about local women. She is starting to open up and ask questions about our 'Holy Book'. We have eagerly shared answers with her and pray she would keep questioning. We're also humbled that her family is allowing her to spend time with us, as usually she isn't allowed out in the evenings.

We've also been able to extend our MC Connect project, which connects young people in the Gulf with Christians via film production workshops. Of course, these workshops have brought both joy and frustration. We rejoice that we're able to spend time with local students, but it does test our patience as we deal with behavioural and emotional issues.

In one event, the young students were playing a game with our staff and asked what the prize would be at the end. Some students assumed it would be an iPad or an iPhone, since that's what they usually receive as a prize in these very wealthy schools. A staff member replied, "No, the prize is a hug from me".

At the end of the game when one of the girls won, she and every other girl came to seek a hug. It may seem like a cheap prize, but not to these children who are desperate for physical affection. The hugs were precious to the girls!



More highlights...

Arabian Dawn: We have successfully produced several more testimony videos of believers in the Gulf, and they have had literally millions of views in the past year. God is using these videos to reach into areas where actual bodies cannot go, so we praise him for technology and media.

Equipment: God has provided, through a sponsoring church in the US, enough funds for us to purchase and update some much-needed equipment for our team.

Young Christians: We unexpectedly had the opportunity to train a group of young local Christians in film production. At first they weren't sure what to expect, but by the end they enjoyed it so much they didn't want to leave. We hope God will use these young people and their new media skills in powerful ways.

Pray for our work in the Gulf:

- ▶ That God would enable each member of the team to use their skills and gifts to the best of their ability for God's glory, and that we would be a united team.
- ▶ For opportunities to impact the lives of the young people we meet, and plant seeds of transformation in their lives.
- ▶ For wisdom in finances: both in using the finances we have been blessed with, and in paying off loans taken to cover operational costs.
- ▶ That we would be a true "light" in each school we visit, to reflect Jesus and his love in everything we do.
- ▶ That God would provide one or two well-trained video editors and a graphic designer to join our team so we can deliver professional quality films. We'd also like to recruit two talented male and female Muslim-background believers to assist us in our ministry.
- ▶ For *I Believe, But...*, our new online video series for Muslim-background believers.

I Believe, But...

"I have two wives, what should I do?"

"How do I support myself financially now my family have rejected me?"

"How can I marry a Christian when my parents want me to marry a Muslim?"

New believers from a Muslim background face a host of difficult questions such as these. Becoming a Christian in Muslim countries, particularly in the Arabian Peninsula, can be an incredibly isolating, confusing and even dangerous experience.

Our team in the Gulf is embarking on an exciting new project to reach out to these struggling Christians online, since meeting physically is often impossible. *I Believe, But...* is an online video series designed to provide biblical answers to the seemingly insurmountable questions these believers face on a daily basis.

Please pray for our team as this project gets underway, and for these otherwise-unreachable Christians, that through these videos they would find an outlet for their struggles, answers to their questions, and tools to help grow them into a deeper relationship with God.



We're going to Spring Harvest!

We're delighted to announce that MEM is going to be exhibiting at Spring Harvest this year, from 2-6th April 2016 in Minehead.

This is a wonderful opportunity for us to promote our work among individuals and churches from all over the country. If you're going to be there, do drop by our stand and greet the team!

If you'd like further information on any of the projects or prayer points mentioned in this newsletter, or have any feedback on our communications, we'd love to hear from you.

**Please contact us using the details below.
Thank you!**

Justice, compassion & hope through media

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