

PRAYER & PRAISE

Quarterly news from Middle East Media

ISSUE 98 **OCTOBER 2017**

AN INCALCULABLE PRICE
BASMA'S STORY CONTINUES

FUTURE LEADERS COURSE
GOES AHEAD! MEDIA OUTREACH
TRAINING FOR NORTH AFRICAN
CHRISTIANS

middle east
media

"On those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."

ISAIAH 9:2

Dear Friends,

When you think of the 'Middle East'... what's the first word that comes to mind?

War... refugees... persecution... *darkness*. I've found that for most people, these are the kinds of words they tend to associate with the Middle East - and they're usually negative. We see the Middle East on the news and it seems like one big warzone, with bombs dropping and seemingly endless conflicts, both old and new.

Of course, the Middle East, like much of the world, is truly facing great instability. But in the midst of the darkness, we know there is light - because **Jesus is the Light of the World, and He hasn't abandoned the Middle East!**

At MEM we believe that **local Middle Eastern believers are the hope for the Middle East** - acting as Jesus' hands and feet to bring God's love into their societies and transforming them from within. As long as there is a faithful Christian witness in the region, **there is still hope**.

I had the privilege of speaking to a couple of different church groups in Devon earlier this month about the Middle East and the work of MEM (*a special welcome to those of you who signed up at those events!*) The overwhelming response to MEM's work was amazement at what God is doing

in the Middle East, and relief at hearing some good news coming from the region for a change!

So, as you read this latest issue of *Prayer & Praise*, I hope that you too will be encouraged by what God is doing in the Middle East and the faithful witness of His people in the region. Our work really is making a difference, and our staff are truly shining God's light in a dark place.

In this issue we have a special focus on Future Leaders (p6-9), our filmmaking and discipleship course for young Middle Eastern Christians. The course almost had to be cancelled due to security concerns for gatherings of Christians, but thankfully it not only went ahead but was our most successful course yet! Thank you so much to all of you who prayed for this course over the summer.

We also have the promised update about Basma (p5), our producer in the Gulf team. Life can be incredibly difficult for new believers in the Gulf, as Basma has experienced first hand. Please continue to remember her and her family in your prayers.

Finally, we would love to come and speak in your church about our work, and inspire you with stories of God at work in the Middle East! If that's something you would be interested in, please do get in touch with me directly at emily@mem.org.

In Him,



Emily Shurmer
Communications Manager
emily@mem.org

COVER PHOTO: EGYPTIANSTUDIO / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Invite a speaker!

"Emily's talk was full of hope and inspiration. It has really changed the way I think about the Middle East region and its people!"

It was great to hear about the amazing work of MEM and how they are challenging practices like child marriage and the oppression of women."

Sophie
Ivybridge Methodist Church
Devon, UK



Are you interested in learning more about what God is doing in the Middle East?

We would love to come and talk to you about our work, show some of our videos, and spend some time praying together for the region and its people. If you'd like to have a free speaker from MEM at your church, coffee morning or small group, we'd love to hear from you.

Get in touch with Emily at emily@mem.org to find out more!

AN INCALCULABLE PRICE

Following Jesus in the Gulf

"Qur'anic prescriptions remain unflinching: 'If they turn renegades, seize them and slay them wherever ye find them'. And these 'religious renegades' are paying an incalculable price for their spiritual migration to Christ.

Yet they continue to come. What began as a few scattered expressions of dissent is now growing more substantial. Historically unprecedented numbers of Muslim men and women are wading against the current of their societies to follow Jesus Christ. And it is only beginning."

From *A Wind in the House of Islam*,
David Garrison



PHOTO CREDIT: RAISMAN / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Christians in the Arabian Gulf make up a tiny 0.3% of the population.

Many of these are expatriates and migrants, so it's almost impossible to know how many are actually local believers from a Muslim background.

In most of the Gulf states, foreign Christians enjoy relative freedom to worship, though evangelism is strictly prohibited. For local Arab believers, though, life is much more difficult.

Believers from a Muslim background face intense persecution from their family, communities and governments. It is illegal to convert from Islam to Christianity in most of the Gulf, and converts face the death penalty in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE and Yemen. If they are found out, new believers are at serious risk of losing their families, jobs and even their lives.

And yet, still people across the Gulf are choosing faith in Jesus!

This was the reality for Basma, one of MEM's producers in the Gulf. Basma had a young family when she became a Christian over 15 years ago. But when her husband found out about her new faith, he beat her severely and she had to flee her home country, leaving her small son and two daughters behind.

Over the years, Basma heard that her son, Awad, had joined the Muslim Brotherhood and had been imprisoned several times for radicalist behaviour.

Basma was finally able to see her daughters again last year for the first time in 15 years, and could finally explain to them why she had to leave. Basma's daughters were also able to give her news of Awad. His father had beaten him so severely that he was now in a coma, and was unable to walk - all because **he too had now become a believer and had been baptized!**

Thankfully, since then, we have received news that Basma's son is starting to walk and talk again normally - but his prospects now look bleak. He has missed his school exams, and is unable to return home as he is likely to be in danger from the Muslim Brotherhood.

Despite the incalculable price of her faith, Basma remains steadfast in Jesus Christ and is committed to reaching her own people through media.

"She is actually strengthened by what has been happening in her family," says Leina, from our Gulf team. "She sees it as God answering her 15 years of prayer for her son to become a believer."

PLEASE PRAY FOR BASMA AND HER FAMILY:

- **Thank God for Basma's faith in the face of such hardships.** Please pray that God would reveal Himself to her family members, including her 2 daughters. Pray for the full recovery of Awad and for God's protection on him. Thank God for the powerful witness of Basma and the team as they produce media to reach their own people with the Good News.
- **Pray for the many believers from a Muslim background across the Gulf, many of whom will be keeping their faith a secret.** Please pray God would be close to them and strengthen them, and that they would find our media online and realise they aren't alone.

For more ways to pray, visit our partner site *Praying Through the Arabian Peninsula* at pray-ap.info



Future leaders

Media & discipleship training brings hope to North African young people

"This camp has been a miracle from beginning to end!"

This summer, over 60 young people from across North Africa gathered together to learn media production, spiritual leadership and discipleship skills on our Future Leaders summer camp.

The young Christians learnt media skills including camerawork, scriptwriting, editing and directing, as well as Biblical teaching for their personal lives and guidance on reaching out to their non-Christian friends with media messages.

To date, we have run 11 training events and trained almost 250 young Christians through *Future Leaders*. The summer camp was our biggest and best course yet, but it almost wasn't able to go ahead at all!

AGAINST THE ODDS

A *Future Leaders* course was originally scheduled to take place in July, but in the wake of recent terrorist attacks against Christians, many of the parents started pulling their children out of the course. This left our trainers in a difficult position, as they'd committed to training 100 young people and were now left with only 35!

On top of that, the Evangelical Church in the country in which we work placed a ban on all gatherings of Christians during July, again for fear of Islamist attacks. The *Future Leaders* course was starting to look very unlikely.

Thankfully, though, we managed to reschedule the course for August. The ban was lifted as promised, the participants had the courage to attend despite the dangers, and we were miraculously able to run the camp in safety, against all the odds!

We were thrilled that four participants were even able to attend from Sudan, driving thousands of miles to take part. They have asked us to run the training for their fellow believers in Sudan - please pray we would find the funding to be able to meet this need.

"We are really excited about MEM's current training initiative, Future Leaders. What could be more important in a world overwhelmed with communications than raising young communicators with a worthwhile message, a real sense of purpose and the professional skills needed to make an impact?"

"We have long been convinced of MEM's professionalism, so we are not surprised that MEM's skills and expertise are increasingly in demand throughout the region. We have known and supported MEM for over twenty years... We wholeheartedly endorse this training initiative."



Marion Osgood

Vice-Chair & Overseas Support, Association of Christian Writers

Hugh Osgood

The Free Churches Moderator and Co-President of Churches Together in England

Read on for testimonies from our participants, and how you can pray...



"I was very excited to go to the Future Leaders camp as I desperately wanted to help my church with their drama and media programmes. I learned more than I ever thought possible in such a short space of time. I am so excited to go back and teach others the different things I have learned about directing and filming techniques, and encourage them to share their own stories in this way."

Abdo, 19, one of four Sudanese participants at the camp. He is the head of his church group's drama programme.*

CONNECTING TO YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH ONLINE MEDIA

The Middle East & North Africa has a very youthful population - nearly a third of the region's 355 million people are aged 15-25. The use of the internet and social networks is very high among this demographic. Four in 10 people in the Middle East watch online videos daily, and every day there are over 310 million YouTube views - the second highest in the world. If we want to reach people where they are, then online media is the place to start!

"Media is the main way that Muslims across the Middle East are coming to know Jesus," says Abram*, head of the *Future Leaders* project. "They don't have the ability to attend church, so they only know what they can find through the Internet and TV."

Abram saw the need to train young Middle Eastern Christians in simple media techniques so they could reach their friends in an accessible, relevant way. By the end of the course, participants had learnt to make their own videos, and four final video productions were uploaded to the Future Leaders Facebook page.

Since they were uploaded in August, these videos have been viewed tens of thousands of times. The four videos were entirely written, produced and directed by the course participants, and covered themes such as harassment, negative speech, breaking the cycle of violence with tolerance and love, and looking beyond oneself to meet others' needs.

**Names changed for security*

"Many young people find it hard to talk to their friends about what they believe and what they think," says Abram. "But if they can give them a video and show them, it's very easy to convey their messages and start a conversation."

According to Abram, these videos can have huge impact and start young people on a different journey in their lives, simply by showing another point of view.

"The culture here is not to ask questions and not to think for yourself," Abram continued. "These videos prompt young people to start thinking. When they start to think, they want to find out more. Day by day people start to ask, and media can answer. **A simple video can start someone on a long journey, a life journey, towards the truth.**"

"I loved the atmosphere at the camp so much. The balance between learning so many new things about film production and also having time set aside for prayer and worship together with other participants was great. The quality of the training was so much more advanced and exciting than I expected before attending. I couldn't believe how quickly we were able to learn and then create our own short films before the end of the course!"

Mara, 18, Future Leaders participant*

Please pray for Future Leaders:

- **Thank God that He answered our prayers**, and that the course was able to go ahead and that He kept everyone safe. Thank God for the valuable skills these young Christians gained to equip them as leaders and media makers.
- **Pray for the young people who watch the Future Leaders videos online**. They have already been viewed tens of thousands of times on Facebook - pray they would make a huge impact in young people's lives and start their journey towards Jesus.
- **Pray that we could raise the funds for further Future Leaders courses**. They have been requested all over North Africa, including in Sudan and among Syrian refugees.



Yes! I want to join with MEM to make a difference in the Middle East...

Full name

Address

Postcode

Email

I WISH TO DONATE: £10 £20 £50 £100

Other amount: £

TO: North Africa The Gulf Where most needed

HOW TO GIVE:

Cheque or Voucher (CAF/Stewardship): Please make your cheque/voucher payable to Middle East Media and return to FREEPOST MEM.

Card payments: Visit www.mem.org/give to pay by debit card, credit card or Paypal.

Standing order: Tick if you'd like us to send you a standing order form:
You can also download a standing order form at www.mem.org/give

Legacy: If you'd like more information on leaving a legacy to MEM, tick here:

GIFT AID DECLARATION (Extra 25%) *Please tick as appropriate:*

I am a UK taxpayer and I want to Gift Aid my donation to MEM and any donation I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years. I understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

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Signed

Date

Please detach this form and send to FREEPOST MEM along with your gift. **Thank you!**

If you are not in the UK, please visit www.mem.org/give to donate online.

Donate now! Your gift will make a real difference to Middle Eastern believers like Basma and Abram as they produce media for their own people, bringing hope to the region.

Do you have a
passion for the
Middle East?

Turn your passion into action at
www.mem.org/pray/action

PHOTO CREDIT: DARRYL CHADDOCK / JUNS PLASH

Sowing seeds of transformation

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