



Adventist School Bouchrieh (ASB) school and grounds.

Photo courtesy of Jimmy Choufani.

Adventist School Bouchrieh

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Adventist School Bouchrieh (ASB) is a coeducational day school operated by the East Mediterranean Region of the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission. Following the education ideals of the Seventh-day Adventist church, it offers four levels of education (kindergarten to secondary) and is accredited by the Lebanese Ministry of Education.

Early Years

ASB is a descendant of the Middle East Secondary School (MESS) founded in 1949 near the campus of the current Middle East University (formerly Middle East College). The original location was where the East Mediterranean Region offices are today. On February 15, 1949, the Ministry of Education in Lebanon issued a permit to Middle East College (MEC) authorizing it to operate a secondary school in addition to the four-year college program.¹

In its early years, MESS operated under the umbrella of the education department of MEC with Edith Davis as its first principal. The school developed as a result of a branch Sabbath School class begun by Davis and some of the college students for children in the community. MESS's main purpose was to serve as a laboratory for students who were training to be teachers.

In June 1960, Henry Jeha was appointed principal of Middle East College Preparatory School.² Additional classrooms were added to the building, making it possible to accept more students. For the 1961-1962 school year, Jeha, then principal of both elementary and secondary levels, reported a total enrollment of 92 students. Assisting him in the school were Habib Bishara, Tawfic Shartouni, Mokhtar Nashed, and seven student teachers.³

Jad Katrib was appointed principal in 1963 and served until 1965, when he was succeeded by E. W. Waring.⁴ In June 1966, Middle East College received full accreditation from the Lebanese Ministry of Education as a degree-granting institution of higher learning.⁵ Wanting to boost Adventist secondary education in Lebanon, the Middle East Division made plans to separate MESS from the college. On March 22, 1967, at a meeting of the Middle East Division (MED) Committee, it was voted to build new facilities and begin operation of a large mission-type school with English as the principle language of instruction.⁶

At the same time, church administration submitted a request to the Ministry of Education for a permit to operate the secondary school separately from MEC. On August 6, 1967, the ministry issued a decision (No. 624) to authorize the Middle East Union Mission (MEUM) to operate MESS as an independent school with Jad Katrib as the principal.⁷

Students at MECSS were encouraged to be actively involved in ministry. During the summers of 1966 and 1967, the Armenian students participated in the student literature evangelism program of the Middle East Division.⁸

Construction of the new school building at the foot of Sabtieh Hill began in January 1969 in Bouchrieh, Jdeidet El Matn. The new Bouchrieh Seventh-day Adventist church building was on the east side of the property and MESS on the west side. The new facility consisted of a two-floor administration building containing classrooms, a science laboratory, registration and business offices, and an auditorium. A dormitory had been planned, but did not materialize. The 19,000 square-meter campus hosted a small canteen, a barn, a huge orange orchard, and two playgrounds.⁹

When the school year began in October 1969, MESS officially came into existence as a separate institution from MEC and the campus they had shared since 1949. The surrounding communities welcomed Katrib, his staff, and

the 265 students (grades 1-12). All enjoyed their first year in the new facilities, even though much remained to be completed in the building and grounds.¹⁰

Students and their families were invited to attend Sabbath School classes every week at the Bouchrieh Seventh-day Adventist Church and to participate in group activities such as the Missionary Volunteer (MV) Society. Approximately 30 to 40 students from all faiths attended every week.¹¹ On May 29, 1970, the first MV investiture service for the young students of MESS was held. In addition, the first graduation exercise took place a month later on June 17, 1970, in which 14 students received secondary school diplomas.¹²

Katrib served as principal until 1971 and was succeeded by Issa Kharma. In 1972 the Ministry of Education authorized the church administration to change the name of the school from Middle East Secondary School to Bouchrieh Adventist Secondary School (BASS).¹³

War Years and After

A few years later civil war broke out in Lebanon and continued for a period of 15 years from 1975 to 1990. During this critical time in Lebanon's history, the school continued to serve the community in providing quality education in times of peace and war. It also cared for families during periods of civil unrest.

BASS had a well-built underground auditorium which was used as a bomb shelter. In 1978, 70 families with more than 400 members found refuge there during nine straight days of bombardment to Christian neighborhoods. Many people were wounded and killed, and houses were destroyed as rockets and bombs fell on the area around MED and MEC.¹⁴

In an interview with Rose Kharma (wife of Issa Kharma), she tells about the impact the school had on the community during the war years. "After the civil war began, the school opened up their auditorium to the families in the community who had lost their homes. Teachers from the school and staff from the MED provided them with food, water, and clothing while pastors encouraged and prayed with them."

Kharma remembers that a few of the families stayed in the shelter for up to two years. Years later some of the children from these families became teachers at the school. Seven of the students who graduated one year later became physicians. Three of them currently (2020) live in the area and are now sending their own children to the school.¹⁵

After the war, teachers and the youth department leader for the Middle East Union and East Mediterranean Field, Jimmy Choufani, actively encouraged the students from BASS to attend the ten-day summer camp in the mountains near the village of Baskinta. At the end of every summer, a reunion of all camp participants was held. This led to weekly Wednesday night meetings which 60 to 80 students attended. Meetings rotated between students' homes in the winter and public places in nature in the spring. Students sang camp songs, studied the Bible, and socialized afterwards. On Saturday afternoons, all were invited to attend vespers at MEC.¹⁶

Bible classes were an important part of the education curriculum. The Missionary Volunteer Society classes were integrated with the Bible curriculum for both elementary and intermediate levels, creating a higher level of student interest and engagement. Investiture services were held at the end of each school year. Each Bible class began with a time of praise and worship. Interested students were invited to join the church choir. Students who were not Adventists were sometimes asked to participate in the Sabbath School by reading the mission story.¹⁷

In 1997, Issa Obied replaced Kharma as the principal of BASS.¹⁸ During his term (1997 to 2001) a new kindergarten facility was established in the area that formerly hosted the farm. This new addition contributed to the increase of both students and teaching staff.

After having served as assistant principal since 1997, Johnny Issa was appointed principal in 2001 and served until 2004.¹⁹ The first full graduation for grade 12 students in 2001 took place in the open space in the pre-school premises and has continued to be held outdoors until today (2020). In 2002 the first KG 2 graduation was held. As of 2001, subject coordinators were contracted to enhance academic quality at the school, and the first school yearbook was introduced under the name *Ajial*, meaning "Generations." The Adventist Volunteer Student program was resumed after the civil war, and for the first time the Friendship Team (as currently known) came from Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, to conduct a week of spiritual emphasis. Under the leadership of Glenn Russell, they continue to come every year.²⁰

Issa was succeeded by Jimmy Choufani.²¹ In 2005 the school utilized part of the property to establish new sports facilities (outdoor basketball court) and redesigned the school garden to make it more accommodating to meet the students' needs. A new parking area and soccer field were established in 2008. In addition to its regular program, in 2011 the school received recognition by the Ministry of Education which allowed its high school program to enroll students from different nationalities.²²

Community service became an integral part of the BASS's operation and the students received several awards for their contribution to the community.

For three consecutive years (2010-2013), students from BASS participated in a nationwide program hosted by the Lebanon Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) TV station. The program was called *Nehna La Baad* (We Are Here for Each Other) and involved identifying a poor family in the community that had specific needs. For two years (2010-2011) students, teachers, and parents worked together to completely renovate a poor family's home. The third year (2013) money was donated by students' families to buy a medical bed and aspiration machine for a sick person. LBC granted an award "for remarkable effort of students and school in achieving the goals of the life-changing initiative program."²³

Music and sports play a vital role in the curriculum of BASS. Students participate in nationwide contests and activities, and many awards in choir, soccer, and basketball have been received over the years.

In 2013 the special education program was introduced to help accommodate students with academic challenges and needs. During an education conference of the East Mediterranean Field (EMF) in October 2013, it was decided that in order to reflect the identity of the school as an Adventist institution, the English name should be changed to Adventist School Bouchrieh (ASB). This change also reflects the literal translation of the Arabic name in the permit granted by the Ministry of Education. An action was taken at the yearend meetings of EMR on November 18, 2013, to put this into effect.²⁴

Guided by the support of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lebanon, ASB continues to serve the community academically, socially, and spiritually. Over the course of time, thousands of graduates have played an important role locally and internationally. Significant contributions have been made to the fields of medicine, law, education, ministry, business, and politics, among others.

Summary of Principals

Edith Davis (1956-1961); Henry Jeha (1961-1963); Jad Katrib (1963-1965); E. W. Waring (1965-1966); Jad Katrib (1966-1971); Issa Kharma (1971-1997); Issa Obied (1997-2001); Johnny Issa (2001-2004); Jimmy Choufani (2004-present).

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