



The mosaics street (Palestra) at the ancient site of Tyre.

Photo courtesy of Farid Khoury.

Lebanon

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Lebanon at a Glance

Unique for its mix of peoples, religions, and outlooks on life, the Republic of Lebanon was in many ways shaped by geography, after which it is named. Traditional scholarship recognizes the region in ancient times—or at least its mountains—which earned the Semitic name, “Laban,” “white” for its snow-covered peaks in the winter. The

term became “Lubnan” in modern Arabic, transliterated into English as Lebanon. Other researchers drew a link between “*Lobnan*” and “*Louban*,” the name of a fragrance tree that was widely spread in Lebanon since antiquity and dedicated to the goddess Astarte. Hence, the “White Mountain” came to be known also as the “Mountain of Fragrance.”¹

A very small nation of only 10,452 square kilometers (4035 square miles, about one-third the size of Belgium and the smallest nation in mainland Asia), its political, economic, and even religious significance is enhanced by its location between the Mediterranean Sea and the Arabian hinterland. In the absence of a census, the population is variously estimated between 4.8 million and 6.8 million, including roughly two million refugees and other foreigners.² Christians comprise approximately 36.2 percent of the population (including Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, and Protestants) while Muslims (including Shi’ites, Sunnis, Druze and Alawites) account for 63 percent. The remainder comprises Baha’is, Buddhists, Hindus, and even Jews.³

Stretching the length of the country from north to south, and close to the coast, the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountain ranges made cultivation difficult and land transportation burdensome. In ancient times this encouraged the Semitic population to settle along the coast. Canaanite by ancestry and culture while Phoenician by locality and identity, their three main cities of Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre engaged in long-distance trade and became crossroads of trade between east and west. Phoenicians transported vast quantities of cedar and pine timber, in addition to carved ivories, glass, silk, and the famous crimson-dyed textiles that were in high demand in all the cities they sailed to.⁴ Furthermore, the early Byblian Phoenician alphabetic script was found inscribed on the sarcophagus of Ahiiram, king of Byblos. The Greeks adopted the alphabet, and modified by the Romans, it became the basis of all modern alphabets.⁵

Strategically important and wealthy but relatively small in population, the land attracted invaders over the centuries. Conquerors documented their passage through the country by leaving inscriptions on the rocky cliffs along the Dog River north of Beirut. The 19 inscriptions included eight different languages: Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Greek, Latin, French, English, and Arabic.

Biblical Connections

Though Canaanite in religion, the Phoenicians nevertheless influenced the Hebrews in social, political, and religious realms.⁶ To build Solomon’s Temple at Jerusalem, Hiram, King of Tyre, furnished cedar and other woods from Lebanon and craftsmen. In reporting the construction, both 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles relate that Hiram-Abi, the master builder and craftsman, was the son of a mother from Dan and a father from Tyre.

In less happy times, Ahab, King of Israel, took as his wife Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon, and fostered Baal worship in Israel. Ironically, during the drought sent as punishment, Elijah the prophet fled to Zaraphath (modern Sarepta) in Phoenecia.

Lebanon is mentioned 68 times in the Old Testament, and Phoenicia an additional three times in the New Testament, by Matthew and Mark.⁷ Jesus Himself visited Tyre and Sidon where He met a Canaanite woman and healed her demon-possessed daughter (Matt. 15:21–28).

Religious Trends in Lebanon From the Time of Christ

In 65 B.C. Pompey incorporated Phoenicia as part of the Roman province of Syria. During the *Pax Romana* the inhabitants of the principle cities Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre were granted Roman citizenship, while economic and intellectual activities flourished (to 180 A.D.). Christianity was introduced within a few years of Christ's death, as evidenced by Paul's visit to Tyre.

During the late 4th and early 5th centuries, a hermit named Maron established a monastic tradition north of Mount Lebanon. His monks spread his teaching about monotheism and asceticism among the Lebanese Christians and remaining pagans in the mountains and coastal plains. These followers came to be known as Maronites and moved into the mountains to avoid religious persecution by the Roman authorities.

During the 7th century A.D., the Muslim Arab Umayyad dynasty conquered Syria and established a new regime, replacing Byzantine rule. Islam and the Arabic language were officially dominant under the new regime, but the Christians in Lebanon's rugged mountains, and in particular the Maronite community, clung to their faith and managed a large degree of autonomy despite the succession of Islamic rulers in Damascus.

During the 11th and 12th centuries, European Crusaders occupied large parts of present-day Lebanon. One of the lasting effects was the contact between the mainly French Crusaders and the Maronites who claimed allegiance to the pope in Rome. These initial contacts led to centuries of support from France and Italy, even after the fall of the Crusader States in the region and its domination by Mamluk.

From 1516 and until 1918 the Ottoman Empire formally ruled Lebanon and neighboring regions of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. For Lebanon's religiously-mixed population, this was an eventful period. The coastal cities remained predominantly Sunni Muslim and Greek Orthodox, under Ottoman rule. In Mount Lebanon, however, a new "*Unitarian*" Muslim movement emerged, with its followers known as the Druze. Local rulers of the *Ma'n dynasty* (1516--1697), succeeded by the *Shihab dynasty* (1697--1842), aspired to unite Christians and the Druze and fight for the full independence of Lebanon. However, this was put down in the end, and successive Ottoman governors struggled for dominance, with resulting sectarian battles and massacres between the Christian, Druze, and Muslim communities.

World War I inflicted great suffering on the Lebanese coast and mountain regions. With allied warships blockading the coast, Ottoman military authorities blocked the supply of grain from the interior. The resulting great famine (1915-1918) cost 100,000 lives among the middle classes and the poor.⁸

The Allied conquest in the final days of World War I broke Ottoman rule over Lebanon, and the post-war peace settlement granted France a mandate over the region. In 1920 the French declared the State of Grand Lebanon; in 1926, a new constitution changed the name to the Republic of Lebanon, with Beirut as its capital city. In 1943 Lebanon gained its full independence from the French Mandate, and modern Lebanon became a republic with a parliamentary system of government. The members of parliament are divided equally between Christians and Muslims. The official language is Arabic, while the French and English languages are heavily used in the country.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lebanon: The Beginnings (1897-1913)

For centuries the people of Lebanon, particularly the Christians, showed a favorable orientation toward western cultures. In the nineteenth century the country began to experience rapid changes toward modernism, as well. One catalyst behind this intellectual awakening was the extensive activity of the missionaries, beginning with the Catholics from France and then the Protestants from America. In 1823 Pliny Fisk arrived in Beirut, sent by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. He was one of the earliest teachers in this region.⁹ The work of these missions developed positively and culminated in the establishment of two prominent educational institutions: Syrian Protestant College in 1866 (now the American University of Beirut) and the French University of Saint Joseph in 1875.

The first Adventist missionary endeavor was by Abram La Rue, a self-supporting missionary working in China. He visited Beirut briefly in 1897 and dropped off some literature with the intention of planting “the seeds of truth.”¹⁰ Following La Rue’s visit, H. P. Holser came from the Central European Conference in 1898 with a desire to start publishing Adventist tracts in Arabic. The reports these visitors carried with them helped to fuel an ongoing discussion on the nature of the approaches that should be used in the Middle East to better reach local communities. Institutional approaches appeared to be more effective, rather than individual missionaries.¹¹

In 1901 Ludwig R. Conradi, president of the European Seventh-day Adventist Mission, embarked on a tour of the Middle East, which was part of its territory. His itinerary included a stop in Beirut where he met Dr. Daniel Bliss, president of the Syrian Protestant College. He was invited to tour the institution and was impressed with the work and the feedback he heard from the missionaries he met on campus. He was even more impressed as he witnessed the publishing work that was being done and the many Arabic publications, especially the Arabic Bible. As a result of this visit, Conradi was convinced that the headquarters for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Middle East should be in Beirut.¹²

In 1902 a Syrian layman who lived in the United States visited his parents in Lebanon and brought with him a copy of *Bible Readings*. He convinced the Presbyterian pastor in his town of the claims of the seventh-day Sabbath. The pastor, Elias Zurub (Zarub), not knowing that there were other Adventists in the Middle East, went to the United States and spent six months in Berrien Springs, Michigan, where he was mentored by church

leaders into a deeper understanding of the Adventist faith. He returned to Beirut in 1903 as an Adventist worker.¹³

When Zurub returned to his hometown in southern Lebanon, he connected with John Harry Krum, who was working at the time as a missionary colporteur and preacher in Palestine. Together they toured the Christian villages in the south as colporteurs. Sabbath keepers were reported in Beirut as early as 1904. Near the end of 1905 W. H. Wakeham, superintendent of the Egyptian Mission, visited the area and baptized Anistas Khouri, a woman who had begun to keep the Sabbath five years earlier while on a visit to New York. She was teaching a private school at Choueifat, near Beirut. Wakeham also baptized a former Catholic priest in the village of Maghdouché near Sidon. At that time there were several adherents in Malaka (?), near Beirut, and Deir Mimas, near Mount Hermon. In Beirut a German masseur named Haussman and his wife, who had been a nurse at the Basel Sanitarium, were engaged in private health work. Haussman was a convert of the Krums in Jaffa.¹⁴

In 1908 Walter K. Ising arrived in Beirut from Germany. He dedicated a year to learn the Arabic language before embarking more fully on his mission work. The labors of some of the early national converts, in addition to the work done by the Haussmans, laid the groundwork for Elder Ising to launch the first church. However, there seemed to be a significant difference between Krum's approach and that of Zurub, who adopted a locally compatible approach by printing his own literature and baptizing his own converts. In a sense, Zurub was on "the verge of initiating a Middle Eastern church."¹⁵ His efforts were not well accepted by the church administration, and shortly thereafter he and his family emigrated to Brazil where they remained faithful Adventists.¹⁶

In 1909 Ising was appointed as head of the Syrian-Egyptian Mission that consisted of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. There were possibly seven or eight members in Beirut at that time. Ising rented a house in Ras Beirut near the Syrian Protestant College where he was able to study the Bible with a group of students. He eventually baptized five of them in 1911. Three of the five newly baptized were Ibrahim Al Khalil, Shukri Nowfel (a Lebanese who later became the first Lebanese ordained minister), and Bashir Hasso (a pioneer layman from Iraq).¹⁷

Under Ising's leadership, between 1908 and 1911, the first church was established with a membership of 13, comprising seven Arabs, five Germans, and one Armenian.¹⁸ In 1912 Ising reported people who were keeping the Sabbath in three different areas in Lebanon. One was a Protestant woman who joined the church the following year.¹⁹ At the same time, two colporteurs were selling pamphlets in the mountain villages: Tigran Zachary (an Armenian Persian who became an Adventist in Cairo in 1909) and Michael Ghafary, one of the earliest Lebanese converts. Shortly after in 1913, Ising was promoted to president of the Middle East Mission, and he left for Mesopotamia (Iraq) to further the work there.²⁰ While Ising was away for nine months, Zachary and Khalil continued the work in Lebanon.²¹

The mission gained a foothold during the years between 1908 and 1911, "The converts in Beirut were all young, educated men and had, except for the foreigners, an oriental outlook. Ising's firm leadership enabled the mission to build on its western and denominational expectations, as well as on the oriental culture, since both elements were present in the church."²²

The Adventist Church in Lebanon Survives Two World Wars (1914-1943)

When World War I broke out in 1914, the small international group of Adventist believers in Beirut quickly scattered. Ising was interned as a prisoner of war in Malta by the British for five years. Most of the missionaries went back to their countries, and only a handful of nationals remained.²³

With the departure of most of its foreign and Arab members, likewise, returning to their native homes in Mesopotamia and Syria, the mission in the Bible lands practically ceased to function. While still maintaining his faith, each individual member remained without fellowship and pastoral care, except for in Lebanon where the former Presbyterian pastor, Ibrahim Khalil, retained communication with believers and with the headquarters of the Armenian Seventh-day Adventist Mission in Istanbul.²⁴

Henry Erzberger, a Swiss, came to Beirut and remained there for a while during the war. During this time the members held their Sabbath services at Bhamdoun in the mountains and at the Erzberger home in Ras Beirut. In 1915 the Beirut church had 10 members, but in 1917, Erzberger moved to Jerusalem.²⁵ The records of church activities between 1917 and 1923 are rather sparse, due to the intensity of the war. The original membership seemed to have dwindled or scattered.

The year 1923 marked the arrival of Nils Zerne from Switzerland who was named director of the Syrian Mission comprising Syria, Lebanon, and Cyprus. Zerne was able to revive the work in Beirut with the support he got from Shukri Nowfel, Ibrahim Al Khalil, Stanley Bull (a missionary working in the Egypto-Syrian Mission), William Lesovski and his wife Charlotte, in addition to Ising. In 1923 ten Adventist Armenian refugees from Turkey formed the beginning of the Beirut Armenian church, and Erzberger baptized Armenian converts.²⁶ In 1926 the Ghazal brothers, Chamoun, Melki, Ibrahim, and Najib were baptized in the Beirut River and their wives followed in their footsteps two years later.²⁷

Walter Ising's leadership experience in the Middle East and the years as a prisoner of war allowed him to reformulate the vision for the work in this area. There was much debate about the effectiveness of the medical work on its own;²⁸ so, in Lebanon, an educational approach was used. In 1929 Miss Hana Jubran Nasr was appointed as headmistress of the first Adventist elementary school in Mouseitbeh, Beirut, where the Arabic Church was located. The school expanded to provide secondary level training around the year 1953 and was named Beirut Junior Academy. Soon after, it became a full-fledged high school and was renamed Mouseitbeh

Adventist Secondary School.²⁹

The year 1938, under the leadership of Pastor Neshan Hovhannessian, witnessed the establishment of the first Armenian Adventist elementary school in Beirut. This mission school was completed in 1965 with facilities connected to the Bourj Hammoud Church.³⁰

In 1937 George D. Keough returned to the Middle East as president of the Syrian-Egyptian Mission based in Lebanon. He had worked in Egypt for many years before. He felt strongly that there was a need for the church to establish an institution of higher education to better prepare and develop indigenous pastors and leaders. By 1939 approval had been granted, and the Adventist College of Beirut (later, Middle East College [MEC] and after 2001, Middle East University [MEU]) was established. It began on the Mouseitbeh property, and moved several times before settling on its current location in Sabtieh (See Middle East University article).

Once again, the world experienced another cycle of brutality with the outbreak of World War II (1939-1945). Many things were brought to a halt in the work of the church in Lebanon. Missionaries were asked to return to their home bases, and the national workers continued to sustain the work in good faith.

The Postwar Period of Church Development: (1944-2000)

The independence of Lebanon on November 22, 1943, and the end of World War II in 1945 brought peace to the country. Efforts to spread the message in the areas south of Beirut were begun in the village of Aramoun by a lay member, Nabeeha Nowfel Khoury. Later a school was established there in 1944 and 1945 to provide primary and elementary education to the community. Over time many families who appreciated the work that was being done by the school and the church registered their children.³¹

The year 1948 was a productive one for the church. In addition to the good news coming from Aramoun and Bishmezzine, the Armenian Church in Beirut also managed to establish a church choir that would help them expand their ministry among the Armenians.³² In the village of Beit Mery (east of Beirut) in the Metn area, Pastor Chafic Srour conducted an evangelistic effort that yielded five baptisms.³³

One of the biggest highlights of 1948 was the founding of a Bible Correspondence School that was called the Voice of Prophecy. The office was located on the third floor of the Mouseitbeh Church building in West Beirut. The initiative was fully supported by the church members in Beirut as hundreds came to register for the lessons that were distributed on a daily basis by the school. With the increased needs from the community, health lessons were translated to Arabic and distributed, as well. The Voice of Prophecy school operated from 1948 to 1976 and conducted many graduation ceremonies.³⁴

Also in 1948, Pastor Wayne Olson and his wife Mildred were called to begin the work in north Lebanon. Their choice fell on the coastal town of Chekka in the Koura District since it was located along the highway that led to Tripoli, the biggest city in the northern part of the country. The Olsons endured many challenges and

persecution, but they still managed to build good ties with the people. As a result, the Sheikh of the town promised them a piece of land if they would build a school.³⁵ The Olsons succeeded in starting the school and recruited about sixty students, but unfortunately it was short-lived. They were also able to baptize many individuals.³⁶

The Olsons teamed up with a number of indigenous ministers to expand the work in Koura: Mousa Ghazal, Michael Kebbas, Faris Bishai, George Raffoul, and Maurice Katreeb. This team effort culminated in the organization of the Bishmezzine School in 1952, which began operations at the primary and elementary level.³⁷ Ms. Rita Srour clearly remembers how happy the parents were to join the assembly hour that was organized by the school every Friday just before students were dismissed.³⁸ The Bishmezzine church building was completed between 1954 and 1955. It is interesting to note that Mrs. Gladys Kubrock, Mrs. White's great granddaughter,³⁹ and her husband were generous contributors toward the building of the church.

During the time they spent there, the Olsons and the Kubrocks initiated practical activities of interest to the community. Due to relationships they established with the locals, many families joined the church and continue to serve until present (2022).

With the expansion of the work of the church, the leaders became much more convinced of the immediate need to establish an Arabic publishing work that would enable them to cover such needs. In 1947 the Middle East Press for Printing and Publishing was founded in Beirut. In 1984, due to financial difficulties and the civil war in Lebanon, Middle East Press subsequently merged with the publishing department of Middle East Union Mission, and all materials were sent to an outside printing house. This practice has continued up to the present (2021).

Another concern surfaced when the municipality of Beirut decided, at the beginning of 1953, to prohibit any kind of religious activity beyond the boundaries of any church vicinity. That decision triggered the idea among church leaders to buy a piece of land in Achrafieh near the national museum, where they could build an evangelistic center.⁴⁰ The building was finally completed in 1959 and comprised three stories including a 250 seat evangelistic center on the ground floor, a physiotherapy clinic on the first floor, and the headquarters of the Lebanon Section and the Voice of Prophecy on the second floor.⁴¹ An important climax of the year 1953 was a major investiture service organized for 195 children that had participated in the activities of the Mission Volunteer Society (founded around 1949).⁴²

The first training camp for young Master's Guide leaders was held in the summer of 1953, after which summer youth camps operated annually for many years. The first senior camp was organized in 1959. Eventually in 1963, the Lebanon Section purchased a campsite in Tannourine, northern Lebanon, located on a mountain property forested with cedars.⁴³ This was the first such Adventist camp in the Middle East. It was used every summer for many years.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, government regulations, which required military training in the schools, led to the formation of Medical Cadet Corps camps in the summers of 1956 and 1957, and for a few years civil defense classes were taught during the school year.

Middle East Secondary School (MESS) was founded in 1949 near the campus of Middle East College as a laboratory for teacher-training students, under the auspices of the Education Department of MEC. In 1967 the school received authorization to operate as a separate entity. Construction of the new building for the school started in January 1969 at the foot of Sabtieh Hill, and when classes began in 1972, it was renamed Bouchrieh Adventist Secondary School. 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). Today (2021) the school continues to provide students with quality education.⁴⁵

Beginning in 1954, Miss Edith Davis and students from Middle East College organized a Pathfinder club in the Assyrian neighborhood in the Sabtieh area. (“Sabtieh” is a transliteration from Arabic referring to the name given to the geographical area because of the Adventist population located there.) This initiative eventually became the nucleus of the Bouchrieh Seventh-day Adventist Church. Interests from the Pathfinder club grew into an Arabic branch Sabbath School. By 1957 this had become a regular branch Sabbath School in a rented building, with Edith Davis leading out and students from the Religion Department helping with church services. In 1960 these meetings were conducted in the college chapel after the English services, and in 1965 they moved to the men’s dormitory worship room, with Samir Shahine as the first pastor.⁴⁶ The church group eventually moved to the Bouchrieh district after completion of the church building and its subsequent dedication on January 17, 1970.⁴⁷

In 1955 a recording studio for preparing radio broadcasts was constructed on the campus of Middle East College. From 1956 to 1959 Dr. Clifford Anderson’s health lectures, translated into Arabic, were broadcast regularly by the Lebanese national radio. This media initiative subsequently grew into Trans Media Group MENAU, including Hope Channel, Adventist World Radio, Digital Evangelism, Communication, Publishing and Translated Service, which continues to operate today (2021).⁴⁸

Back in 1938 the Armenian and Arabic congregations in Beirut had places of worship, but it was not long before those were overcrowded. A new church for the Armenian believers was constructed on property adjoining the school and was dedicated on July 30, 1955. Three years later in 1958, however, hostile political conditions in the neighborhood of the Armenian Church threatened the lives of worshipers and forced them to move to the other side of the Beirut River in Bourj Hammoud.

The congregation was very active in the 60s, which created the need for a larger worship space. A new Armenian church auditorium, the largest Adventist church building in the Middle East, was completed in January of 1965.⁴⁹ With the purpose of using the auditorium as an evangelistic center, it was built with seating capacity up to 700 people. When Pastor Manoug Nazirian conducted its first evangelistic series, the hall was full to overflowing.⁵⁰ The Middle East Division Committee had secured copyright permission in 1955 for material to be used in the Arabic church hymnal that was being developed to provide a more meaningful worship experience.⁵¹ In 1958 another copyright was provided for the Armenian church hymnal.⁵²

In 1959 Lebanon became a Section and remained as such until 1970.⁵³ The leadership of the section was comprised mostly of national workers: Salim Noujaim (president), George Yared (secretary-treasurer), Salim Hasbany, George Khoury, and Aram Aghassian.⁵⁴

A new Arabic church was built at Mouseitbeh in 1959. Shehada Halaby and Pastor Anees Haddad secured permission in 1961 to show temperance films in the Lebanese public schools, prepared by the SDA Church.⁵⁵ The Middle East Division Committee voted in 1965 to upgrade the three schools in Mouseitbeh, Bourj Hammoud, and Bishmezzine by offering education up to the tenth grade.⁵⁶

In 1967 the emphasis in missions began to be placed on the outreach of the church to non-Christians, and a program was inaugurated at the Beirut Adventist Center in Achrafieh by Harley Bresee. A very new approach to evangelism was undertaken in 1969 when the Middle East Division Committee voted to authorize the purchase of equipment that would facilitate telephone evangelism. It was a pilot project initiated by the Ministerial Department.⁵⁷ In 1970 work was also pioneered in the mountain village of Bikfaya, led by Jerald Whitehouse. In the northern Lebanon city of Tripoli an experimental evangelistic program was conducted among the non-Christians of the city by the Middle East Union TEAM program.⁵⁸

Much good work continued to take place in the churches, schools, Voice of Prophecy, et cetera until the year 1975 when a major civil war broke out in the country. The war brought much devastation to the people of Lebanon and was a catalyst for the emigration of large numbers of families—Christian and non-Christian—including many Adventist families. Church institutions sustained damage and some were discontinued.

Middle East College and the field administration managed to continue operating from Lebanon throughout the war even though the offices of the union, as well as the division, were moved to Cyprus.

The civil war ended in October of 1990, but Lebanon's crisis continued. The Ta'if Agreement authorized Syrian overlordship and a new Lebanese regime. Another war broke out in April 1996 from the south (Operation Grapes of Wrath, a campaign of the Israeli Forces against Hezbollah). Even when that war was over, the country continued to experience significant unrest until some stability was established in the year 2000.⁵⁹ Such unrest did not hinder the church leadership from commemorating the 100th anniversary of Adventist work in Lebanon. On June 5 and 6, 1998, Middle East College hosted an historical celebration where the entire Adventist Church constituency in Lebanon was invited, in addition to union, division, and GC leadership. This occasion was a time of inspiration, fellowship, and renewed commitment to the mission of the church to fulfill the Great Commission.⁶⁰

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lebanon in the 21st Century

At the turn of the century, the fragile stability the country enjoyed allowed church leadership and institutions to develop the work further and to maintain a reputable status in the community. Middle East College was able to acquire university status in 2001, becoming Middle East University. This change of status enabled the university to offer graduate programs and to better further the mission of the church.

Both the Bouchrieh Adventist Secondary School and the Mouseitbeh Adventist Secondary School continued to serve their respective communities in Sabtieh and Mouseitbeh. Young volunteers came through the Adventist volunteer service of the church and were able to build positive relations with students, inviting them to attend the organized youth activities, especially the Sabbath evening sports and the summer camps.

The assassination of the Lebanese Prime Minister on February 14, 2005, and the 33 days of war in July-August of 2006, were two major setbacks to the country and its people. Many plans for development were halted because of the insecurity that was prevalent at the time. The continuing unrest and instability that the country experienced because of more assassinations of public figures made it difficult to initiate new outreach projects in the community. However, amidst all these challenges, Women's Ministries, Family Ministries, Youth Ministries, Health Ministries, Community Services, and other church programs continued to extend their services and support to many needy community families.

Both the Iraqi and Syrian crises led many refugees to seek shelter in Lebanon during the last quarter of 2011. As those families randomly settled, different churches organized ongoing programs of support such as food and clothing distributions. Finances for such endeavors were collected through international donations and also through generous national contributors.⁶¹

In addition to the physical needs that refugee families had, there was also another urgent need to be met—that of educating their young children. Due to the large influx of refugees, the Lebanese government was not able to properly accommodate all the children into their schools. Consequently, the church felt the need to provide education for these children and, as a result, The Adventist Learning Center (ALC) was founded in 2013 in the Bourj Hammoud area. This initiative started as one of MENA's centers of influence outreach projects and served Syrian and Kurdish refugee children who had not been in any regular educational system for several years.⁶²

Besides the educational services provided at ALC, Alexis Hurd-Shires, the director, and all the teachers are very intentional in establishing supportive relationships with the families through home visits, small group classes in English literacy, and computer skills.⁶³ A similar learning center was also launched in Bishmezzine School, north Lebanon in the fall of 2017. The school facility was renovated for the purpose of receiving Syrian refugees that needed help after school, and it is still continuing this service today (2021).

The history of the Adventist work in Lebanon includes many factors beyond the control of the church. After the civil war, due to immigration and attrition, church membership that had reached over one thousand members before and at the start of the war, dropped to approximately four hundred by 1997.⁶⁴ This meant that there was

no longer sufficient leadership or membership to maintain the structures that were in place. Rebuilding has been slow and is ongoing. Challenges to the work in Lebanon remain. The main ones include the lack of national ordained pastors and trained professionals who are able to influence the Arabic-speaking communities, as well as the ability to initiate more outreach projects.

Church Organization and Statistics

During the formative period of Adventist work in the Middle East, the term Syria was used to denote the present countries of Syria and Lebanon. From 1899 to 1908 the Syria Mission (comprising Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia [Iraq] and Arabia) was under the Levant Union Mission with headquarters in Darmstadt, Germany. In 1909 the Syrian Mission was renamed as the Syrian-Egyptian Mission after Egypt and Egyptian Sudan were added to the territory.

In 1912 the Syrian-Egyptian Mission was reorganized as the Syria Mission with only Syria and Mesopotamia in its territory. Arabia was added to the Syrian Mission in 1913, and in 1915 the Syrian Mission was renamed as the Arabic-Syrian Mission. In 1923 the Egypt-Syrian Union Mission was organized, later to be reorganized in 1927 as the Arabic Union Mission with its headquarters in Jerusalem, Palestine. The Syrian Mission was part of it.

In 1930 the Syrian Mission consisted of Syria, Grand Lebanon and Cyprus. In 1944 the Arabic Union Mission was renamed as the Middle East Union Mission (MEUM) with the Syrian Mission as part of its territory from 1944 to 1947.

In 1948 Lebanon became part of the Lebanon-Syria Mission under the MEUM, and in 1958 it was renamed as Lebanon-Syria Section, maintaining this status until 1970. At this time MEUM organized its number of local fields into the East Mediterranean Field (EMF) which comprised Lebanon, Syria, Cyprus, Turkey, and Jordan. When in the 1990s Cyprus and Turkey were placed under the administration of the Middle East Union Mission, the EMF was limited to three countries—Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. In 2012 EMF was changed to the East Mediterranean Region and remains under that name till the present (2022).⁶⁵

Lebanon was under the jurisdiction of the following divisions respectively—the European Division Missions (1913-1927), the Central European Division (1928-1937), the Middle East Division (1951-1970), the Afro-Mideast Division (1970-1982), and the Trans-European Division (1995-2011). Between 1981 to 1995 it was part of the Middle East Union Mission, which was attached directly to the General Conference, as it became again from 2011 to the present time (2022) as part of the Middle East North Africa (MENA) Union. Lebanon served as host country for the headquarters of two divisions (Middle East Division and Afro-Mideast Division) and two unions (Middle East Union and Middle East North Africa Union).

At the end of the fourth quarter of 2021, Lebanon has three churches, one company, and a membership of 356.

Superintendents, Directors, and Presidents

Walter K. Ising (1909-1914, 1930-1937); Henry Erzberger (1915-1917); Nils Zerne (1923-1929); George Keough (1938-1942); E. L. Branson (1943-1946, 1949 and 1950); B. J. Mondics (1947 and 1948); R. H. Hartwell (1952-1955); Salim Noujaim (1959-1961); Harry Robinson (1962 and 1963); George Khoury (1963-1967); Chafic Srour (1967-1971); R. D. Pifer (1971-1974); Borge Schantz (1974-1976); Manoug Nazirian (1977-1983); Basim Aziz (1985-1988); Samir Chahine (1988-1990); Roland Fidelia (1992-1996),⁶⁷ Claude Lombart (1996-1999); Sven H. Jensen (1999 and 2000); Levon Maksoudian (2000-2011); Miroslav Didara (2012 and 2013); Michael Collins (2015 and 2016); Gilberto C. Araujo (2017-2019); Darron Boyd (2020-).⁶⁸

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