

February 2022

Dear Friends,

Sherri and I have some big news to share with you. In recent years, we've had a growing sense that God is tugging on our hearts to return and do mission service in the Arabic-speaking world again.

Many of you will remember that we served in Egypt from 2005 to 2009. It was invigorating to be learning Arabic, building trust on behalf of the gospel in a Muslim setting, and training people for Christian ministry in that region. We had thought we were called there long term, and were deeply saddened when we were forced to leave. It felt as though our ministry, dreams, and future were taken from us – though in the end we landed well and have deeply appreciated our 11 years in Zambia.

When the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) in Lebanon began inviting me to teach short intensive courses in Arabic, starting in 2015, it felt redemptive and exhilarating to get to use the experience and skills I had gained in Egypt. Upon return from that first trip to Lebanon, I remember telling friends that it was either the experience of a lifetime to get to do that again, or that I'd be going back for more when I could. I did keep going back to offer short courses. I had students from all across North Africa and the Middle East, and to my surprise, lots more Presbyterians and Anglicans than Baptists.

ABTS also began asking if I would consider joining their full-time faculty long term. Sherri and I have been wrestling with and answering some questions: What do we, in particular, need to do on behalf of the gospel and the world within this limited lifetime? Where and when do we most come alive in serving what is good for the kingdom of God and the progress of the gospel? As much as we love Justo Mwale and Zambia, answering such questions has helped us to trace God's hand pointing us back to the Arabic-speaking world.

We have a sense of unfinished work to do, and the move to Lebanon also feels like wise stewardship. Sherri and I spent thousands of hours studying Arabic in the past. In Lebanon, I can use both my training as a New Testament scholar *and* my training in Arabic. I feel if I were to live a long life, but didn't do my best to return to the Middle East, it would be something I'd regret. Sherri would love the gift of time to refresh her Arabic and be prayerfully present in the Middle East, to discern a path of ministry while being there on the ground. She's excited to get to have a ministry of presence and ask open questions about what God is doing there and how she might fit.

We've felt a sense of redemption as this seminary in Lebanon has reached out to us. Only God owns the future, and we feel he is giving a part of ourselves back to us as we begin to make this move to serve that part of the world again. Something feels really right for us to be living, praying, and doing mission service again in the Middle East. Trusting in God's provision, we hope to move to Lebanon this fall. We can imagine some questions coming to your minds. *Isn't Lebanon in turmoil?* Yes, Lebanon is going through tough times politically and especially economically. While this is sobering, ABTS still believes it's good for us to join them there, and we appreciate prayers for God to prepare us to live there and to be an encouragement. *What about Zambia and Justo Mwale University?*

We've had happy years serving in Zambia since 2010. Sherri has enjoyed coordinating the Young Adult Volunteer site, among her other forms of service. Teaching at JMU has been some of the happiest work of my life. Zambia has been a good place for us as a family. Our sense of pull to the Middle East does not arise from thinking that training people for Christian ministry in Zambia and surrounding countries, as JMU does, is less necessary or less important than in the Middle East. JMU is uniquely positioned for training Reformed and Presbyterian pastors for numerous African countries, and few settings provide a similar opportunity to walk with and touch such a huge piece of the African church as Justo Mwale. We want to stay engaged with JMU. It's still at the exploratory stage, but the president of the seminary in Lebanon has offered that I can teach an intensive course each year in Zambia, even as JMU allowed me to do in Lebanon.

*What does this mean for our relationship with Presbyterian World Mission?* We are very thankful for our 17 good years serving through Presbyterian World Mission, but we need to share that we are

ending our service with PWM on May 15. Though we are closing our time with PWM, we invite PCUSA churches to be involved in its work. The new funding model still allows you to develop a relationship with a Mission Co-worker and give "in honor of" him or her. If you are looking for a new mission co-worker to support, we recommend Rev. Paula Cooper, our colleague and supervisor, who is Regional Liaison for Zambia, Malawi, Rwanda, and Kenya and who lives on the Justo Mwale campus.

Sherri and I are excited about our future mission service and long to lean into this new direction as faithfully as possible. We would love for you to continue walking with us and praying for us. We intend to be sent through an organization called The Antioch Partners. As you can imagine, 2022 is going to be a major year of change for us. We very much appreciate your prayers as we step forward toward ministry in Lebanon.

Yours in Christ,

Dustin and Sherri

P.S. Please feel free to be in touch with questions or to process anything. Our personal emails are:

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