

A TRIBUTE to Raja Nwaisser

John Haines—EURASIA Regional Education Coordinator

It is always difficult to lose a friend, a comrade, a partner in any endeavor of mutual commitment. To lose a 'son in the faith' prematurely is hard to understand and accept. Raja Nwaisser, was all of these. I came to know him soon after his conversion, and in early conversations with him, sensed a sincere heart and deep longing to serve the Lord. He pursued God's call on his life with vigor and seemed to cherish every opportunity to bear witness to God's grace in his life. His smile was contagious, and if one could not understand the nuance of his Arabic jokes, one always joined in the laughter simply because Raja was laughing. I did not expect to hear the sad news of his passing, nor did I ever think I would be half a world away, and unable to be at his side when it came time to say 'good-bye'. Raja was just 40 years old.

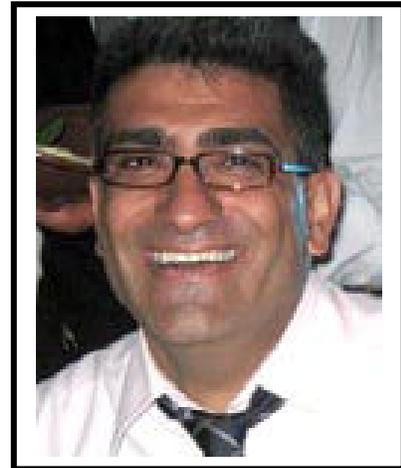
The following tribute was written by Kay Browning, wife of Lindell Browning, Field Strategy Coordinator for the Eastern Mediterranean Field, shortly after his passing:

Eastern Mediterranean Churches Mourn Sudden Death of Jordanian Pastor

Kay Browning—Eastern Mediterranean—Middle East

Nazarenes are mourning the unexpected death of Rev. Raja Nwaisser, president of the Eastern Mediterranean Nazarene Bible College (EMNBC), who passed away Sunday, 21 September after a massive heart attack.

The Lebanon District had joined together for a baptismal service at the Ashrifiyah Church in Beirut; the Jordanian-born Rev. Nwaisser was baptizing a new believer when he suffered a major heart attack and died.



"I know this loss is not just mine alone but it is a loss to all of us," Nwaisser's wife Seta told Lindell Browning. "My dear brother Raja was much more to all of us than pastor and President of the Bible College but a true friend, full of love, compassion, and care."

Rev. Nwaisser was born in Jordan on September 20, 1968. He worked as a police officer after completing high school, until he gave his life to Christ and felt God calling him to ministry. He began studying at the Mediterranean Bible College in Beirut and Eastern Mediterranean Nazarene Bible College, later completing his BA at European Nazarene Bible College in Büsingen, Germany. In 1996 Rev. Nwaisser moved to Beirut, Lebanon to pastor the Sin Ilfil Church of the Nazarene. He attended Beirut's Near East School of Theology and earned his Master's of Divinity. Rev. Nwaisser also served as an assistant district superintendent (D.S.) for Lebanon from 1998 to 2006 and was instrumental in building the district from one to three churches.

Rev. Nwaisser had a heart for teaching and developing leadership. He was elected President of EMNBC in 2003, the first national leader of the institution. He is survived by his wife, Seta, and two young daughters, Glory and Holy.

“The wonderful thing about serving here in the Middle East is that I will see Raja often,” said Eastern Mediterranean Field Strategy Coordinator Lindell Browning. “I will see him in the lives of those that have been so influenced by him. His sermons and lessons and even his jokes—and there were many—will be remembered and retold often. As I saw Jesus in Raja, I will see Raja in those who came to Jesus through him.”



Returning to the Region nearly six weeks after Raja’s passing, it seemed that there was a huge gaping hole. The administration of EMNBC needed to pass through an appropriate mourning period, and laying plans for the 2009 cycle of courses and Summer intensive modules presented a number of challenges. Mawiyah Halasah, the academic dean of EMNBC, and Marlene Mshantaf, the registrar, continue to provide academic and administrative leadership and support. However, the position of president will not be filled immediately. Nonetheless, there is great optimism for the future of EMNBC, and deep commitment to sustain the unique endeavor of the college.

Mighty Warrior

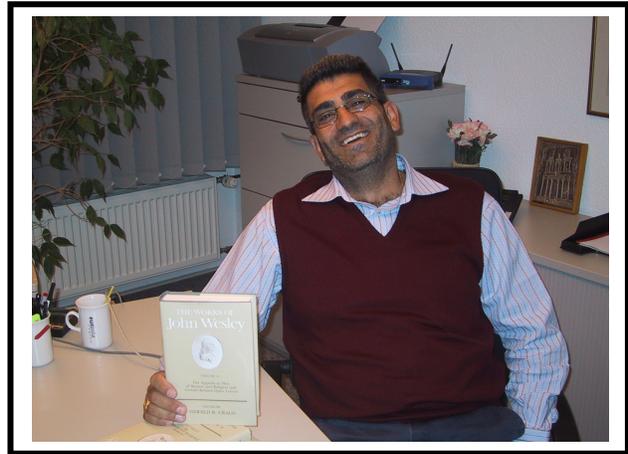
By: Nabil Habiby

If followers of Raja we were,
then like Raja
our earthly days of service are over.
Alas, Satan
your plan is undone,
your lies unearthed,
for followers of Jesus we are
and He lives on;
then the torch we will carry
the word we will spread.
Rest in peace pastor,
the disciples of Raja live on,
one down
hundreds to come.
Rest in peace pastor,
the disciples of Jesus live on,
one down
thousands to come.
Enjoy His eternal presence,
mighty warrior.

One of Raja’s youth wrote a poem for his memorial service, which expresses the sentiment of so many. While everyone mourns the loss of Raja, there is a clear recognition that any affirmation of his life and ministry will be proven through faithful continuance in service to the One Whom Raja served. He led his local church, the Lebanon District, and Eastern Mediterranean Nazarene Bible College with a clear and steady commitment to point everyone to Christ—the only One Who could make a real difference in the Middle East. The school will always bear the mark of his sensitive and loving spirit, and those who studied under his tutelage will forever recall his gentle and encouraging words. Raja modeled what he hoped would be the markers for those who studied at EMNBC: deep faith in One Who does not disappoint; untiring faithfulness in service to Him Who called; sensitive brotherly kindness that reaches out and bears another’s burdens without complaint; and a hopeful and gracious spirit that concluded every plan—personal or institutional—with ‘Lord willing’.

Raja was the first Arab national leader to be named president of EMNBC, and he believed in a future for the school that could best be articulated with an Arabic voice. He and the Arabic-speaking faculty have been participating in Professional Development Seminars provided by the Region for the last three years. Together, they have desired to see the school develop to its highest potential, with her students engaged in transformational ministries across the Middle East. The recent Missional Review of EMNBC affirmed this vision. Increased interest in the Wesleyan roots of the Church of the Nazarene and clear articulations of sound Wesleyan doctrine for the Arab Middle East, have marked recent years. Raja enjoyed participating in the latest Global Theology Conference, and had begun expressing desire to see a Theology Conference in Arabic to consider Wesleyan perspectives that might be meaningful in the context of a diverse and troubled Middle East region.

Raja was giddy with delight when he discovered an 'extra' set of Wesley's works in the Regional Education Office last year. He packed them carefully in his luggage and kept saying: "This is great...our students need Wesley today!" Of course, they need more than books, they need models of what is expressed in those books; and Raja was just such a model of Scriptural holiness lived out in Wesleyan ways.



Raja Nwaissar was a vocal participant in the Regional Education Council and Regional Course of Study Advisory Committee; always bringing his own unique perspective to discussions, and communicating a sense of urgency and joy in his passion for Nazarene higher education on the EURASIA Region. He was indeed a brother beloved to all who served with him.

As one who walked with Raja through the years of his development and his recent leadership, I give thanks for the godly man that he was. I believe he leaves a legacy that has not yet been fully grasped, but I am sure it will be seen in the lives of the young Arab men and women who knew and loved him as pastor, teacher, and friend. For those of us of other cultures who encountered him, we will remember one who embraced us as we were and rejoiced in the love of Christ that embraces us all. Today, Raja is indeed embraced in the loving arms of God.

Colossians 3:3-4 bear testimony to our hope for Raja, and indeed, ourselves as we seek to live the holy life in our diverse and troubled contexts:

"For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, Who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

Peace be upon you, brother Raja.