CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The Willow Creek Association team often meets with leaders who long to have access to the GLS and Christian leadership resources. Their leadership development is limited by lack of availability, cultural restraints, oppression and even persecution. We serve these courageous leaders by providing leadership tools where it’s needed most.

With the support of faithful donors, in 2013 the GLS was taken into Jordan, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and two countries that we cannot disclose due to security issues. The GLS in Egypt was canceled due to conflict in the country. Leaders from Middle Eastern nations closed to Christian leadership development often attend the GLS at neighboring countries. As a result there is a growing desire to expand the GLS in this region. We invite you to read these stories from the Middle East.

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN THE MIDDLE EAST:
Strong Muslim influence, oppression and persecution, evangelism restraints, corruption, and limited access to Christian resources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>RELIGION</th>
<th>POPULATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>92% Muslim</td>
<td>6M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>96% Muslim</td>
<td>5M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>96% Muslim</td>
<td>193M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>90% Muslim</td>
<td>85M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Ripple Effect Of The GLS

Christian leaders in Pakistan face great opposition, often at the risk of losing their lives for the sake of bringing the Gospel into their communities. Our friends in Pakistan courageously host the GLS in order to train, encourage and build up leaders in this difficult region.

While all Christian leaders in Pakistan face opposition, women in leadership battle even greater challenges. One woman, moved by the GLS and the impact it had on her and her leadership, started a women’s leadership training program. “We will do all we can to get trained” she said. More than half of the 45 women who enrolled in the 11-month leadership program were forced to drop out due to pressure from male leaders. Undeterred, 22 women (ranging in age from 18-72) continued with the program, learning from world-class GLS teachers including Bill Hybels and John C. Maxwell.

The vision of the program is to reach every woman in Pakistan with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and teach every woman how to read, write and lead. We celebrate these 22 courageous women who graduated from the Women in Leadership Course, the first of its kind in the history of the church in Pakistan. These women who lead as teachers, medical professionals, evangelists, church leaders, college students and women’s rights activists have been encouraged and empowered by this program. The 2013 graduation was a celebration attended by many pastors, leaders and citizens of the Christian community. Already 60 women have enrolled for the 2014 program! Pray for the impact this training will have on these women and their communities.

Pakistan GLS Attendee:

“I’ve been a medical doctor for 38 years. Because of my status and economic position, I’ve always thought of myself as above average. But since the 2013 GLS in Pakistan, my life and my perspective on human lives has changed. My personal view of status and position has been completely transformed.

I had the opportunity to make the biggest decision of my life after Pastor Bill Hybels’ session. During the prayer time, God opened my heart—I repented from my sins, and gave my life to Christ. If I hadn’t attended the GLS, I wouldn’t have come to Christ. Everyone in my family and my friends are amazed at what has happened to me. They are wondering why and how I am a changed person, and this gives me the opportunity to share Jesus with them.”

The first GLS in Dubai, United Arab Emirates

More than 30 churches were represented at the event, creating unity in a city that is otherwise very divided—this alone is a miracle. Church leaders say this kind of gathering would not have been possible five years ago. Credit is given to a city-wide prayer movement among 27 churches that have been praying for this kind of unity for the Kingdom in the Middle East. Attendees arrived from neighboring nations that are currently closed to the GLS. Many of these traveling leaders have never been to a conference like this before, and they wept with joy as the conference started. Three of these pastors are doing ministry in a difficult, unnamed neighboring country, and were so encouraged
The GLS in Dubai was like looking through a window of heaven and seeing Asians, Africans, Westerners and Middle Easterners all learning and growing together.

A Shared Vision in Jordan

Despite great opposition and persecution, 250 church leaders from various countries in the Middle East gathered in Jordan for the GLS. With a shared vision to reach their countries for Christ, they are committed to maximizing the opportunities God provides—including the impact of GLS training, resources and inspiration.

At the GLS in an undisclosed country:

A woman took a five-hour bus trip to the conference in a heavy mood. She was going to resign because of the overwhelming responsibility for her church and her family. She was tired and felt misunderstood by the others. She could not bear her burden any longer. The key to her problem was emerging. During the GLS, she realized that she was in “the land between” where she found herself desperate and complaining about everything. Her life was like a desert. She said: “God knows what I need before I do. The message from Bill Hybels and Jeff Manion has shown me that God prepares bread for you when you just wish to die. This is food for my soul. I feel like I am recharged and refreshed.”

A Pastor’s Story After The GLS

We are so grateful for the success of the GLS in Pakistan and God’s protection and peace over it. 310 Pastors and leaders from different denominations and backgrounds attended three locations this year. The teaching from each session impacted leaders in a mighty way. They experienced many God moments that encouraged and inspired them as they face daily oppression and persecution. We are so grateful for the 18 volunteers, from eight different churches that came to help make the GLS happen. Praise God for the opportunity to hold the GLS in Pakistan, what a gift it is to Christian leaders here.

After the Summit in Pakistan, I traveled back home with a Pastor friend, and we met two young college students. They asked us where we were coming from, and it gave us the opportunity to share about our experience. We started talking to them about the GLS. While I was telling them about it, I felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to give one of the boys the piece of my jar [a piece of clay from Bill Hybels’ session on Tough Callings]. At first I thought, no way, because I had written my heartfelt commitment on that piece of clay, ‘Because Christ died for me, he loves me, and that’s enough to live and never give up’. I thought, why do I have to give this to him?... We continued the conversation, and actually shared Christ with them by the end of the conversation. One boy started crying, “Jesus loves me too? You know, I broke up with my girlfriend, and was thinking of killing myself. But you are telling me that Christ loves me? I don’t even know him!” And at that moment, I was compelled to give him the jar. I said, “Put this in your bag, and read it when you get home”. The next morning I was thinking about the boys and remembered the jar. My friend’s jar said, ‘I will not let one
For more stories from the GLS, visit willowcreek.com/followtheGLS

person pass by me without letting them know about my Savior Jesus. I will not give up’. The boys ended up calling us, and came to our Sunday service. I am now discipling them. Praise the Lord.”

PRAY FOR LEADERS IN MIDDLE EAST

Christian leaders in the Middle East face oppression and even persecution as the minority in their countries, but their passion for Christ grows. Leadership development, encouragement, and unity are critical in this environment in order to transform their communities for Christ. Leaders like Khalil in Jordan, or James in Pakistan don’t just see corruption, division and persecution—they see opportunity for change, unity and lives reached for Christ. The GLS is a critical part of providing access to opportunities for growth and transformation. Pray for these leaders as they seek to change the outcome for their countries, and build on a new vision for the future—where peace is realized, and lives are reached for Christ.

PLEASE CONSIDER YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

• Continue to support and pray for leadership development in Middle Eastern countries where the WCA is currently doing ministry through the GLS

• Advance the ministry of the WCA by providing funds in additional cities where leaders seek to launch new GLS sites – initial start-up costs include additional translations, training, equipment, and safe venues. We are planning to bring the GLS to Israel and Palestine in 2014

• Make a connection—If your business or ministry is involved in these areas, consider connecting us with them for in-country support and involvement