

[Home](#)
[Bible Societies](#)
[Latest Stories](#)
[Prayer](#)
[About UBS](#)
[Site Map](#)



[Français](#)
[Español](#)

Lebanon

After years of political tension and unrest in Lebanon, a temporary power-sharing agreement instituted last June has brought a relative calm to the country which is set to last until parliamentary elections in May 2009. And over the past few weeks, the Bible Society in Lebanon has used the opportunity to hold a series of events promoting public awareness, fundraising, Bible advocacy and engagement and its role as a publisher.

"We are ending this year with a different kind of 'bang'," said Mike Bassous, the Society's General Secretary. "We took advantage of this temporary calm to implement many programs and events that we had had to postpone."

On November 11, a private dinner was held for major donors and key Christian leaders. The British ambassador, Her Excellency Frances Mary Guy, was the guest of honour. The 60 participants learned about the Bible Society and its history. Photos of the Queen visiting the British and Foreign Bible Society were part of the presentation and Mr Bassous emphasised the importance of the UBS fellowship and the relationships between Bible Societies.



Gathering around God's Word

On November 30, 65 people were Running for Bibles in the Beirut International Marathon, raising funds and awareness for the Bible cause. Among them were three runners sent by the Norwegian Bible Society, along with a local entrant, a staff member from the Bible Society in Lebanon. One of the Norwegians, André Hammrø Løseth, came in sixth place in the 10K run.

On the day before and the day after the marathon the visitors toured Lebanon and Syria where they had the opportunity to see various Bible Society programs and activities.

On December 2, in partnership with Life Publishers, the Bible Society launched the Arabic Full Life Study Bible. A hundred people, representing various churches, publishers, and partner agencies, attended the launch and received complimentary copies of the newly published Scriptures.

Among the speakers was UBS Publishing Consultant Anthony Harrop.

"It is wonderful to see so many church representatives gather around God's Word," said Mr Harrop, as 10 Metropolitans and Bishops of Beirut and Mount Lebanon, plus a handful of evangelical leaders, attended the launch event. Earlier that day, a copy of the Study Bible had been presented to the Patriarch of the Maronite Church, Cardinal Sfeir.

Profound impact on the artist

For its main Christmas fundraising event, on December 13, the Bible Society brought the world famous solo flautist Pedro Eustache to the Unesco Palace give a recital and share his testimony. The hall was filled with almost a thousand people who wanted to meet and listen to the artist who was the main woodwind soloist on the soundtrack music of Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ* and who has been the featured woodwind player with the popular Greek musician Yanni since 1995.

The event evidently had a profound impact on both the audience and the artist.

"Words will never convey what I experienced with you," Mr Eustache told the Bible Society later. His words were echoed by all who came to the concert or saw the event on one of the two Christian televisions that showed it, SAT-7 and Télé-Lumière.

In additions to all these activities, the Bible Society was also an active participant in the Christian Media Exhibition, held by the International Catholic Union of the Press from November 27 to December 7. And its Bible World exhibition had its busiest season ever with more than 1,500 children visiting the interactive Bible experience in the past two months. More than 20,000 visitors have now visited the attraction since its establishment in 2003.

"The calmer situation has given us our busiest two months," said Mr. Bassous, "We pray and hope that the celebration of the coming of the Prince of Peace in this season will have a long-lasting effect in our region."

[Back to Latest Stories](#)

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