The Middle East is a vital part of the modern world, yet Americans have little understood the Arab nations. We are long overdue in rising above the barriers of language, religion, and custom, in taking the time to understand the people, the culture, the traditions of the region. Jordan, which has long extended the hand of friendship to the U.S., is a natural place for us to build relationships . . . to learn, share, and grow in understanding.

I was privileged to have an Iranian room-mate as a college undergraduate. He was a wonderful friend and I would not take anything for the experience of knowing him and other Iranian students who came to the U.S. in the 1960’s, who are still my friends, today. Perhaps it was their influence, but I have always found the Middle East a fascinating part of the world so very different from the traditions of the West. In 1996, I visited Morocco, where we established a relationship with a university. In 1999, I was privileged to travel to Iran. In 2002, I was in Damascus, Syria and had the pleasure of visiting with a number of officials in the Ministry of Higher Education of the Government of Syria. While there, through a mutual friend, Dr. Carolyn Bishop, I first met Nabil Costa, the CEO of the Lebanese Society for Education and Social Development. We visited a couple of times thereafter when Mr. Costa was in the U.S. We identified teacher education as a need of the very fine Beirut Baptist School, and in 2004, our Beeson School of Education and Professional Studies was able to send five professors to Beirut for a workshop for teachers in the Baptist schools in Amman and Beirut. I was also able to tour Beirut, Lebanon and to make friends with a number of people there, as well as people from Amman, Jordan. Each of these experiences only served to strengthen my belief that any serious university needs to have connections to the Middle East in order to gain understanding of the non-Western world. Particularly, because Christians are in the minority there, I felt any way we could encourage and support Christians in the Middle East should be taken as a responsibility.

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