When Rev. Agayby Shehata was a young man living in Egypt, he sensed God saying to him, “One day, you will leave your country and go to the United States.” Shehata, who was saved at age 13, was ordained as a minister by an Assemblies of God church at age 22. He served eight years in southern Egypt and another eight years in Cairo. “Each time God spoke to my heart,” he recalled, “saying ‘You’re here for just a time; then you will leave your country.’ God spoke to me through the Bible, through other people, and through a lot of dreams.”

Shehata currently serves as pastor of Life Church, an Arabic mission that resides at Second Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia—a congregation he has led since 2010 when they met at Ridge Baptist Church. In March 2016, they relocated to Second, and the move has afforded them a lot more space and facilities. The church has grown slowly but steadily since it began.

God led Shehata to his current ministry position via a journey that started years ago as he was learning to pastor while serving in Egypt. In 2006, he was invited to come to the U.S. for about a month. Four years later, he returned to the U.S. to be a pastor. After struggling for nine months, though, Shehata thought he would have to go back to Egypt. “We had no green cards for me or my family, no income, no jobs, no Social Security. But God spoke to my wife through scripture and said, ‘Don’t go back to Egypt. We didn’t understand how we could stay; it was so hard. But God said, ‘No, don’t go back.’”

Life Church focuses on reaching the Arabic-speaking population in Richmond, particularly those who come to the U.S. from Egypt.
One of Shehata’s many challenges as a pastor is the diversity of his various responsibilities; in addition to preaching at all their services, he also is on call around the clock to help newcomers settle into the Richmond area when they arrive. “They need help getting an apartment, getting furniture, getting jobs, and other things. I go with them to get whatever they need.” Shehata’s whole family is involved in the church: his son plays the music, his wife leads singing, and his young daughter is part of their ministry.

“We try to reach the Muslim community,” Shehata explained, “and it’s very hard.” There are over 40,000 Muslims in the Richmond area, and there is an apartment complex only a few miles from Second Baptist Church where many Muslims live. “When we do outreach, we bring bags with gifts for each apartment, and each bag has a Bible,” he said. “We preach and sing songs on the street, preaching in English, Spanish, and Arabic.”

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