

Investing in Trainable Church Leaders
by Lee Bradley
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What does it mean to invest in trainable church leaders?

Investment is a word that carries an understanding of paying for something, often with sacrifice and high cost, in expectation of reaping greater profits at some later time. Our experience at Albanian Bible Institute teaches us that training in theological studies and church leadership is an investment with many fine returns for years to come.

The other day one of our first graduates of ABI came for an unexpected visit. We found the photo of his class from 1996. Almost everyone in that photo looked like a teenager. Many were barely in their 20s at the time. Now many of them are married and have children. Many in that old embarrassing photo serve the Lord capably in Albanian churches. Two serve in Kosova. By almost any standard these guys, who are now in their early 30s, would be considered young leaders. They ARE young leaders, but they are not novices. Some of them would qualify as seasoned leaders after ten years of mentoring, practical ministry experience and training at Albanian Bible Institute. Many, like this young man who visited us the other day, look back fondly on their time at ABI and say it was a big help to their spiritual development.

ABI...an investment for our students

Albanian Bible Institute is an investment for our students. Some of them invest a great deal of their time out of class reading, writing reports and preparing school assignments. This involves time and work that their culture, and sometimes even their own families and churches do not value.

Some of our students leave behind their wives and children for a week at a time to attend school. Others leave behind a stable job or the opportunity to work at a much better wage in Italy or Greece in order to pursue an education here. This has been a two to three year sacrifice for some. Traveling long, pot-holed roads in slow, smoky buses or vans each weekend has been a weekly expense that almost all of our students have had to bear from their own pockets. Amounts of \$5-\$18 a week for a bus ticket seem like nothing in the west. That is like \$50-\$180 for our students.

ABI...an investment for our teachers

Albanian Bible Institute is an investment for our teachers. In addition to countless hours of preparing and presenting lessons, each teacher takes personal time with the students beyond the classroom. Teachers regularly host students in their homes for dinner. During the school year they make visits in the homes of students, getting to know their families and places of ministry. Every night after evening classes, at least one of our teachers is in the building talking with students about anything from life in the west to marriage. On occasions we play games, watch films or go for a walk with our students.

Life in Albania is very relationship-driven. Teachers know this and put the time in those relationships to facilitate maximum response from the students. Schools in the west could learn something from our approach.

ABI...an investment for YOU!

Albanian Bible Institute can be an excellent investment for you as well. Maybe you can not come as a teacher, but you can still make a contribution to what God is doing here. This past year was a great one for stock markets in the world. The New York Stock Exchange grew by over 15% in 2006. This is an impressive figure. However, an investment in ABI will bring greater results than Wall Street. At ABI students grow greatly in their knowledge of the scriptures and theology. They learn skills in Bible interpretation that stay with them for life. They receive an education always complimented by practical ministry experience in the local church. They find Christian friends who encourage them and walk with them throughout their years in school and beyond. Most ABI students continue to visit us and maintain relationships with our faculty long after they leave school. This is a testimony of how our school is personally impacting church leaders.

During the first decade of our existence we have trained 75 students. They work in a diversity of places from the capital city of Tirana to the small, remote villages near the Greek border. They work in large churches that meet in rented halls and small churches that meet in homes. Some work for Christian organizations. Altogether, ABI students serve in numerous churches in 20 of the nation's 36 districts. Some are pastors. Some are worship leaders, youth workers, children's workers or student ministers. Trained leaders lay the foundation for fruitful, disciple-making churches for years to come. Untrained workers don't grow as rapidly in their spiritual lives and soon run out of resources and abilities to lead people into further growth. Your investment in a trained church leader is an investment in a local church. If churches with ABI graduates multiply themselves in time through church planting as they should, your investment will bear fruit through the birth and growth of many more churches. If our graduates go abroad to other mission fields, the return on your investment grows even more. Investing in trainable church leaders is an exciting opportunity when you think about it!

How can you invest in ABI?

I hope you will prayerfully consider making a financial investment in trainable church leaders for Albania. This year we are seeking to enlist 60 partners in sponsoring students for the 2007-08 school year which begins in September. We are seeking individuals, Sunday School classes, Bible study groups, mission groups, churches and Christian businesses to sponsor students. There are lot of people who should be able to help us with this goal, so it should not be too difficult to achieve. Each investment "share" costs \$500. Of course, people can give more or less than that amount of money. Each gift counts and is greatly appreciated. With each investment share of \$500 we will make sure that you get an opportunity to personally know the student you are sponsoring so you can learn more about what he or she is learning at school as well as hearing

about his or her church ministry.

If you would like to be one of these 60 partners, you may send your donation to the International Mission Board, Central and Eastern Europe Office, PO Box 6767, Richmond, VA 23230. Please make a brief note on the check saying "Albanian Project #1-Investing." A short, one-sentence note explaining that the gift goes to "Albanian Project #1-Investing in Trainable Church Leaders" will be helpful in making sure the donation gets routed to this specific need at Albanian Bible Institute. Once the money is received, the IMB will make sure you receive a letter acknowledging your gift to our school.

Your generosity and active concern for the growing Albanian church are greatly appreciated. God's blessings on you for your investment.

Sincerely,

Lee Bradley
Director of Albanian Bible Institute