

Director's Report to Albanian Bible Institute Board

by Lee Bradley
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Dear Friends of the Board,

Thank you for your prayers and continual support of ABI over the last few months. Many of you have responded to emails I have sent you in the last few months. Thank you for your words of encouragement. This has been a period of great activity, but also great encouragement. I am pleased to bring you good news on many fronts.

The students

The students we have this year have the best attitude of any group we have seen in a long time. We are thrilled with their teachability and their concern for the lost. This year on two occasions we have been able to give generous offerings to our ABI graduates who serve in Turkey because our students have given sacrificially. Believe me. These students are not rich, but they are very generous. Sometimes when I see that offering bag that we have, I know that there are some gifts in there like the widow's mite.

This semester we have organized three Saturdays for street evangelism on the boardwalk of Durres. Actually, I did not plan for us to do this but one time, but after the students went one time and had such a good time doing evangelism together, they asked, "Can we do this again?" Who was I to tell them that they could not go witnessing again? So, we did it again. Altogether, after three Saturdays of street witnessing, the students have talked with about 40 individuals about their relationship with the Lord. There have been a few people who have been open to the gospel and some follow-up is being done.

Sometimes I can not believe this group that we have. There have been opportunities for them to go home early on Friday, but they have chosen to stay on campus and spend the night here so they can have fellowship with each other. Some attend classes even when they don't have to go, simply because they want to learn more. I really like this attitude.

The courses

People sometimes ask me what we teach our students at ABI. I often give a very general answer that we teach Bible, theology, hermeneutics, missions and church planting. I fear this answer may be too abstract. Today I would like to give you specifics of just some of the courses the students have had this past semester:

1. Preaching...Students organized and preached two original sermons during the course.
2. Angels and Demons...Students learned the Biblical information about angels and demons and how their activity can affect Albanian church life and Christian ministry.
3. Principles of Hermeneutics...Students learn how to interpret the Bible within a historical context. This is so important since much Bible teaching in churches tends to be propogandistic and out of context. Groups like Jehovah's Witnesses have this approach, but so do too many of the Evangelical churches. Other churches teach the Bible at a very superficial level that focuses only on knowing facts about a story, rather than drawing out major points and ways of application.
4. Introduction to Worship...Students learned how to prepare worship services and even directed

two of the Wednesday night chapel services using the outline they prepared from the course.

5. Chronological Bible Teaching...Students in the church planting track taught two lessons from the Firm Foundations material, which is designed to help people with little or no knowledge of the Bible to understand the plan of salvation from Genesis to the Resurrection.
6. Small Group Bible Studies...Students learned to write a lesson plan and discussion questions in order to lead a small group Bible study. They used these lesson plans and led two small group Bible studies during the course.
7. Perspectives in Global Missions...This course is sometimes referred to as the KAIROS course. Students got a taste of the challenges and needs in each continent of the world and were challenged to consider being missionaries or being involved to a greater degree in international missions.

The teachers and staff

I am thrilled with the good job our teachers have done this year. There are four good men on our staff who teach regularly: Adam Roseboom, Brandon Clark, Pellumb Ranxha and myself. All of these men are highly committed to the task of teaching and investing in the lives of students. They often stay after class and spend time with the students. Our teachers and some of their wives help with the personal discipleship of the students. Even our school secretary, Ornela, is spending time discipling one of our female students. This investment of time and heart is paying off as our students are growing spiritually, as well as in knowledge and skills. As always, I am grateful for the good job that Jerry Lugbill is doing for us in keeping our finances well-maintained. Sandy has taught English to our church planting-missions students this year and has done a great job with that.

We have also been blessed to have guest teachers come in and help us with some courses. Some of these guest teachers have been foreign missionaries who live and work in Albania. Joshua Miekley, Larry Stucky and Alan Bryant are some who have taught courses for us this year. Other teachers have been Albanian church leaders who are now getting more experience and proving their abilities in teaching. Zef Nikolla, Ilir Mitrush, Landi Sula, Xhevdet Arapi, and Tonin Koceku are among those who have come this year. Two or three of these who have taught are ABI graduates. It is good to see the reward of yesterday's work coming to realization as we see these men come back and teach for us. Applause for those who taught these guys so many years ago and wondered if they would ever get this far.

Out and about

In the last semester our teachers have been out among the churches preaching and doing seminars. In the last six months, our teachers have preached in 20 different churches in Albania and Kosova. During the third weekend of November, a group of five of us went up to Kosova to do seminars in three different churches. Joshua Miekley did a seminar for us in Laprake on hermeneutics and will be teaching in Marikaj on Nehemiah-Ezra. Pellumb has been doing a creation seminar this semester in the Church of the Brethren in Elbasan this winter. I will be back in Ferizaj in two weeks to do a seminar on storying. We have other seminars planned in Kosova during the month of May.

On February 28th, the staff went as a group to visit and preach in churches in Tirana. We covered 7 different churches over the weekend. We are planning on doing something similar in the Lushnje-Fier area in late April and in Kosova in May. Every reasonable effort is being made to go out to the churches and become more useful to them. In each prayer update that we write and each personal visit we make with church leaders, we remind them of our availability to come and do seminars and training. During

the past six months I have been even more intentional in meeting local pastors and sharing with them about our availability to preach and lead seminars. The response has been positive so far, though we would like to be used even more. We also hope this will result in better relations with the churches, more hunger for training and more students attending ABI in the future.

The newest adventure...Lay Church Planters School

It has been a thrill to see what God has done with the vision of my Korean colleagues who have had a vision for more church planting and church planting training in Albania. This past spring they approached us with a vision for starting a Lay Church Planters School. At first this seemed like something that would be too much additional work. Still, I felt prodded by the Lord to do it. To be honest, I wasn't sure that many people would be interested. I now see that God was challenging me to have greater faith.

After months of preparation, meetings and prayer (the most important part), this new school began on January 8th. We were encouraged to see 19 students come for the first weekend course, which was on personal evangelism. It was quite an exciting weekend. We had students from four different cities and five different churches. Since that first weekend, we have added 3 more students, bringing our enrollment up to 22. Thus far, we have had courses on personal evangelism, personal discipleship and leading small group Bible studies.

In the Lay Church Planters School, students must DO a practicum with each course they take. No tests. No essays. Just practice what is taught. Nothing is fully learned until it is applied.

We have courses every other weekend, from Friday afternoon at 5:00 till Saturday at 4:00.

Each week over 1,000 people across the globe pray for the lay church planters school. Perhaps you are one of those. When people pray together, God does big things. Thank you for being a part of this new opportunity to train church leaders in Albania.

The building

The heating system was finally installed in December, bringing phase two of our building campaign to a close. As so happens many times, the costs were higher than expected. Still, God's people provided all we needed. Thank you for giving to this and praying for it. It is nice to sit here and write you this from a warm office. The students are quite pleased as well. I am appreciative of the interest free loan of \$5000 that was given to insure the installation of the heating system. Thus far we have paid back \$500 of the amount that was borrowed.

Financial progress

As you read our financial report in detail, you will see that we are doing relatively well financially. We are not wasting money and our expenses for building maintenance seem to be going down now that we have finished remodeling and painting. We also sold the school car, which was always breaking down and costing us money. The installation of the heating system has proven to bring unexpectedly high costs for fuel. So far, we have been buying fuel about twice a month, instead of once a month as I thought. Our electricity bill for December also was unusually high. At the time of the writing of this report, our January bill has not yet come in, though we expect it to be even higher with the additional 13% increase the government allowed the power company to charge starting in January. Maybe in another month the costs will go down as the weather improves and the building does not feel so cold.

In response to our previous board discussions about having a reserve fund, I recently transferred

500,000 lek (\$5000) from IMB accounts that were designated for our school and deposited them in the ABI bank account. Jerry and I have established a time deposit with that money at 7.8% interest for two years. This money will be considered the school's reserve fund to be used only in case of emergency. How nice to have money to put away in case we find ourselves facing a crisis of some kind!

Closing thoughts

These have been encouraging days. It has been a joy to serve in this place and to see rewards from our labors and prayers. God is faithful. We thank him for this and thank him for calling us to serve at Albanian Bible Institute. Thank you so much for all you do to help us, both financially and through your prayers. We know we are not doing this alone. God bless you for your partnership with us.