



ISTL

International School of Theology and Leadership

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Overcoming Earthquakes and Coping with Pandemic

The past academic year was a year like no other for ISTL in Albania. It started amidst the deadliest and the most devastating earthquakes in the world for 2019 and then became even more challenging due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The earthquakes affected us in several ways. Most of our students come from Tirana and Durres where most of the earthquakes hit. There were lots of students' homes, church buildings and even our own Church/ISTL facility that was damaged. As many churches were mobilized so were all our students to bring relief ministries during this time. With some exceptions, all of our classes continued side by side with the relief ministry and we were able to complete our planned Bachelor's and Master's classes until the beginning of March.

During the month of March, as our students, and churches were still trying to recover from the earthquakes, we were challenged by the Pandemic. Our country was forced in immediate lockdown, in which our classes had to be cancelled.

Within a few weeks, we had several meetings as a team and board try-

ing to understand the times and possible changes we were facing in the immediate future. We discussed all options, advantages and challenges, but we knew we were not to give up. Even in this digital age, it was a new endeavor for us to take ISTL and make it an online community so that we could continue our courses.

We offered several training sessions to the students and teachers on the virtual classes, we did some test runs and eventually had our first classes. To our amazement the number of student attendance increased from the previous year. Suddenly, even students that were in distant areas or countries returned to our classes, and now we can say that we could potentially have students not only in the Balkans but as well in Italy, Germany, US and UK. The quality of the classes is still intact, the presentations of teachers and students are easily accessible to all and the take home tests and assignments have encouraged the students to a higher critical thinking level.

With the changes that proved positive, we are now looking to employ

the online Zoom virtual classes for distance learning in addition to face to face classes in Tirana. This will give rise to a higher enrollment for the years ahead.

This summer we have been promoting several study centers in the country. Students can gather at these centers closer to their homes and through the aid of a facilitator as well as virtual classes, they can attend ISTL. This will help with travel, expenses, and challenges of their daily routines. Presently, we have over 20 potential students that would like to enroll in ISTL through these centers. We are thankful that in the midst of all the challenges that we faced, ISTL not only was able to complete the school year program for both Bachelor's and Master's level but the attendance surpassed that of the same time from the previous year and we now have a larger potential and reach in the years ahead.

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Online classes



Church Plant Continues Amidst the Pandemic

The pandemic in Kosovo, especially in the city of Gjilan, has not been easy. Many things have changed for our church, "Family of our Lord Jesus". We knew that many things could not be the same including the main meeting, the Bible studies, and prayer meetings. All gatherings were banned by the State for three months. We thank God that He always opens other doors as we were granted permission to visit people in their homes. It was a real encouragement to them when we prayed in their homes and listened to their needs.

We prayed about how we could be connected in other ways, since zoom meetings seemed difficult to many in our church. We finally set up a group in Viber and began having meetings there until the quarantine ended in June.

At this moment the situation in Kosovo is a little better. We now

have meetings in open spaces with small groups. We have to be very careful. We meet in restaurants, where we have a coffee, then we read the Bible and have our meetings. This is truly a blessing to our people because we are again able to meet together as the body of Christ.

As a current student of ISTL Bible School in Tirana, I have been blessed even through the time of quarantine as I started with online courses. This was really an encouragement for our family. We realized that God is faithful and He cares for us every moment.

Fatos Latifaj, Current Student and Pastor in Gjilan, Kosovo

capital, Tirana. All of our church leaders, who are not regular students of ISTL, joined ISTL Online Learning during April and May. I don't think that there were any problems with online learning. Everything was organized very well. I would hope ISTL Bible School is able to continue to provide opportunities such as online learning to students who would not be able to be physically at the school due to work, distance, family, etc. The online classes were a blessing for each of us.

Renato Tarushi, Current Student and Pastor in Korca, Albania

Online Opportunity of ISTL Expands

I am Renato Tarushi, a current student at ISTL Bible school and pastor of a church in Korca, South Albania. In fact, online learning has been a very good opportunity to many students who are from different cities far away from the



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