

# From Closed Doors to Open Hearts: A Journey of Faith and Teaching at ISTL, Albania

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In 1986, my family and I traveled through Yugoslavia on our way to Greece. We were warned to avoid Albania, as it was considered the most Godless and closed country in the world. I accepted this belief without question and never imagined that I would have the opportunity to visit Albania someday.

Having been a Christian believer from a young age, I had been blessed to experience many wonderful events, responsibilities, and relationships. However, I eventually realized that God was preparing me for the most memorable and fulfilling experiences of my faith.

My wife and I share a love for travel and have explored over 60 countries. Albania was never on our radar until one summer day in 2001, while on the shores of Corfu, we came across an advertisement for day trips to Saranda, Albania. Intrigued, we decided to spend a day in Albania. That one day opened our eyes to the sad, yet real, history of the last 100 years in a country where God was legislated out of people's lives in 1967. It was governed by a dictator who constructed over 750,000 cement bunkers throughout the country, coercing citizens to protect themselves against imagined invasions. The government would occasionally summon citizens to partner up, man the bunkers, and provide them with a rifle, three days' worth of bread, and 30 bullets. This was just a glimpse of the extent of government control over the population.

What started as a one-day visit to Saranda turned into two more holidays with Vangjel, our guide turned friend, and a two-day church conference in Duress, Albania. It was during this conference that Hervin, the head of ISTL, encouraged me to come and teach there. Although I initially searched for excuses, I soon realized that God had already prepared an expectation for me—all I had to do was say yes.

Since 2016, I have had the privilege of teaching at ISTL and witnessing the school's growth each year. Most of the students, in their 30s or 40s, are actively involved in churches as lay leaders or pastoral staff and are first-generation Christians. Many churches have set the expectation that leaders receive formal training through institutions like ISTL.

The year 2020 brought an unexpected curveball as the world grappled with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, disrupting daily activities. Additionally, a serious health condition posed a threat to my teaching commitments. However, God took care of both challenges. ISTL was only briefly closed, and my health was restored, allowing me to continue teaching and partnering with the students who display such openness and eagerness to learn.

Were there moments of apprehension upon returning to teaching? I must admit there were, but the moment I started speaking and Greta interpreted my words perfectly, I knew that God was in control and leading the way. The school is expanding in terms of student enrollment, the utilization of online platforms like Zoom, and the depth of content. People from around the world are embracing the vision of serving God as teachers through ISTL.

Read more school updates

[www.istl.al](http://www.istl.al)