

Avanti Italia!

Onward Italy!

Let's Stay Connected!

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A few days ago, one of my students and I read from Luke 5. In this chapter, we studied Jesus' brief encounter with Levi, his invitation for Levi to follow him, and Levi's acceptance. The scene changes to Levi's house in the following verses. There, Levi holds a dinner in which many people representing different social classes attend. These people include tax collectors, Jesus and his disciples, Pharisees, and many others. My student pointed out something I had never noticed before. First, Jesus extends an invitation to Levi, but later, Levi extends an invitation to Jesus by welcoming him into his home and by introducing him to the people in his life. We spent some time with this thought, discussing the significance behind these parallel events. I sometimes wonder who benefits more from these language sessions, me or my students. The Bible School in Scandicci is a place that always has people coming in and out of its doors. When thinking back on last month's events the impact of inviting others in and showing them hospitality has been made apparent in a number of ways. Here, we are not only blessed to have a space in which we can meet with people, but even more, we are also blessed to see the gospel taking root in people's lives.

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Bethany and I in front of la Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore

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Playing games in English Class at the Church in Florence



Making Mummies from Toilet Paper and other Halloween Games

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Britton Road Church of Christ
2520 W Britton Rd
Oklahoma City, OK 73120

The Month of Guests

The month of October was busy with many guests coming to the Bible School. We are very fortunate to have the facilities within the Bible School to accommodate the workers as well as short term visitors. At different times last month we had one family, two couples, and one single woman stay with us. Visitors who stay with us come to Italy for different reasons. For example, the young woman, Bethany, stayed for a few weeks and helped with advertising for the Bible School, led English kids classes, and held her own language tutoring sessions. In essence, her time at the Bible School mirrored that of what the Avanti Workers do. Also, one of the couples, Ryan and Paula Butterfield, came upon the request of the Avanti Committee in Arkansas to help with team building and group cohesion. The Butterfields were former Avanti Workers and Directors in 2000. After they completed their commitment to the program, they returned to the States to continue their education in Psychology. Both work in therapy and counseling settings and were eager to give back to Avanti Italia by offering their services to help improve the program. Both Bethany and the Butterfields were wonderful additions to the school. Their help and presence were a great source of encouragement for me and for the workers of Avanti Italia. Let this be an invitation for any to come who are interested in the ministry that we do at the school. You will be warmly welcomed!

The Average Week

Language School

My routine of Italian Language School and English Language Teaching has stayed the same since October. The month of November will be my last month of language school. I have mostly enjoyed Italian Language School and the friends I have made in the Italian classroom, though I will be glad to have back the time spent commuting (travel to school can be anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour one way).

Monday Night Bible Study

Our Monday night Bible Study is currently reading the book “Not a Fan” by Kyle Idleman in which Idleman poses difficult questions about how believers view Christ. Do we approach Jesus as over-enthused ‘fans’ or surrendered ‘followers’? We start the study altogether and then break off into smaller groups with the Avanti workers sharing the responsibilities of leading the discussion. Each week draws a different group of people, but whether they are our current readers, former contacts, or American study abroad students, we welcome all participation.

Teaching

Monday through Wednesday I continue to meet with 5 women for one-on-one sessions after I return home from Italian Language School. These women range from ages 14 to mid-60s and are learning English for a variety of reasons. Lorena, for example, has a son-in-law who speaks only English. Estar, on the other hand, is in Junior High School and wants the language practice to reinforce the English she is learning in school. Since my students have different motivations for learning English, I individualize the lessons I have with each of them. Specifically structuring each lesson to meet the language needs and goals of the students requires a good amount of planning, but the time and preparation I invest always pays off. It helps establish an environment in which it is very natural to serve and create relationships.



A Florentine Sculpture



A Deer and Duck Dynasty

A Festive Halloween

In keeping with the spirit of festivity, we most recently threw a Halloween Party. Our Avanti group is filled with many creative thinkers who are very good at organizing events, so the evening was a chance to go all-out on decorations, games, and costumes. All of our students that we meet with, whether in private sessions or in group classes, were invited. Our turnout included over 30 students. Though it was only one day, the evening gave me an idea of what I hope to see more of in the future. I look forward to more opportunities in which we can open our home to our students, inviting them into our lives and giving them a place to feel welcomed.

To my sweet family in Christ, you are always close in thought and in heart. The love that we have together because of Christ binds us despite any distance. As we come into another holiday season, may you be reminded that you are remembered and valued.

Prayers

- * For the departures and transitions of the housemates moving back to the states in December
- * For the arrivals of our new housemate, David, in January
- * For Eric and Jessica Smith's transition into the role of directors at the Bible School- that their enthusiasm may continue to be fueled by the Holy Spirit in sincere love
- * For the Lord's faithfulness in working to make us a cohesive group
- * For the family of believers in Florence who continue to show their kindness towards me and the workers

About Avanti Italia

The missions program I am a part of is called Avanti Italia (A.I.). This mission program has three primary goals: 1. to use our individual talents in sharing the Good News of Jesus the Christ with those who are seeking to have a more perfect relationship with Him, 2. to learn to share Christ with others more effectively, and 3.to participate in mutual encouragement and edification with the Italian churches of Christ. Their method for achieving these goals is mainly through outreach in teaching private Bible lessons in English. As a part of A.I., I would be expected to teach an average of 10-15 Bible lessons a week. Much of the work A.I. encourages would be described as friendship evangelism, making relationships with people and sharing God's saving message with them. Each team member is not only expected to fulfill their obligations, but also to find ways of using his or her individual talents to make more contacts with people. Most of the work is centered at the Florence Bible School in Scandicci, a suburb on the southwest side of Florence. A.I. has had an extensive outreach since its beginning in 1986. Every year, A.I. forms teams of 3-7 members to send to work at the school for a two-year commitment. Team members are required to fundraise, acquire a student visa, and go through intensive training before leaving the United States. Once arriving in Florence, team members live together at the Florence Bible School and immediately begin Italian language studies while teaching English using the Bible. Teachers generally work in one-to-one or small group sessions.