

Avanti Italia!

Onward Italy!

Let's Stay Connected!

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Scripture teaches us that God makes himself known to all nations. "My name is honored by people of other nations from morning till night. All around the world they offer sweet incense and pure offerings in honor of my name. For my name is great among the nations (Mal. 1:11)." His presence has been made evident to me in the lives He has changed around the world. As I recollect the departures of Avanti Workers back to the States, my latest trip to Germany, and the quality time spent with our friends in Italy, the month of December assured me of the Father's presence among the nations. If His presence allows Him to cover such an expanse, I can rest knowing that He is also alongside me. We can live in hopefulness when we are reminded that He is throughout.

Departures and the end of a school term

The first two weeks of December were very busy as we finished our classes for the term. In addition, three of our Avanti Italia workers completed their committed time with Avanti Italia and left for the States. The departures of Lindsey Sullivan, Megan Lawson, and Peter Bell are a reminder that the Bible School is always in a state of transition. With the help of some flexibility and hard work, I am positive that those



Melissa, my Italian housemate, and I at a Christmas Market in Florence

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of us remaining at the school will be able to maintain the work with our classes and with the church. Jodi Luke, another Avanti Worker, returned from her "survey trip" to Vicenza. Although she intends to work with the church there later in the year, it is nice to have her back even if only for a short time.



Zach and I in Chemnitz



Visiting the Werners, my former neighbors in Germany

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Christmas Travels

Once our classes were finished, all of us took time off for the Christmas season. A goal of mine while living in Italy was to make a trip back to Germany. In the early 90s, my family moved to Chemnitz, Germany to start an English language school and help establish a church there. The Lord is faithful in that the church remains active and alive in Chemnitz. I was very grateful to have the chance to return and spend Christmas visiting friends who continue to have a part in my life. Even more so, my boyfriend, Zach Dawson, was able to come during his Christmas break to spend the holidays with me. Together, we spent Christmas with Karen Neel and the Sullivan family. Pam and Larry Sullivan and Karen worked together with my parents in Chemnitz. Karen still resides in Chemnitz, and the Sullivans now live in Leipzig. It was so wonderful spending time with old and new relationships. I was also surprised by how natural it felt to be back in a country in which I can speak and understand most of the language. Going to Germany was definitely a special gift for me.

A New Year

The year ended and has begun so well. I am so thankful for new beginnings. New Year's Day was spent with Rosa, the woman who helps at the school, and her family. Together, we feasted and played fun games with her and her husband, Felice, her daughter and son-in-law, Angela and Carlo, and her granddaughter, Esther. This month we anticipate the returns of many of our housemates. Giacamo and Melissa, our two Italian housemates, return the first week of January, as well as a new Avanti Italia Worker, David Ezell. Although David is new to the program, this is not his first time in Florence. His first time in Florence was on a study abroad program through

Harding, and then later as part of a Let's Start Talking campaign, a mission organization focused on offering English conversation practice using the Bible. We are eager for him to be part of the team and look forward to the new energy he will bring. Other good news comes from Miles and Meredith Thompson who had to return to the states in November to apply for visas. We are so thankful that they received their visas and will be returning to Italy the second week of January.

I am eager to see what this New Year will bring to the Bible School. Our new directors, Eric and Jessica Smith, bring such positive energy to the work here. Working with them and being a part of the vision they have for the school assures me that the efforts of the Avanti Team are guided in the right direction. As a team, our goal for the next spring term includes using our building facilities for more group activities with our students. Soon we will organize an evening to invite all of our students to celebrate the beginning of another term, and then classes will begin. Unlike last term, I will not be in Italian Language School, so I will have more time to conduct classes. In all probability, I will have about 3 times as many students as before. I am excited to have more students, and tailoring each class to their needs and interests. I am also a little bit daunted by what the work load may look like, but I am trying to not let my nerves get to me. For now, I am enjoying the calm pace of the next few days, because soon that will be over. I hope that you have been blessed with moments of rest despite any stress that may have crept in during the holidays. May we remember that in the Lord's greatness He is both among the nations as well as intimately beside us.



I got to see a dear friend of mine, Steffi, while she was on break in Germany from her work in Africa



Some of our Avanti group with Rosa and her family on New Year's Day (Rosa is on the front row to the far right)



Spending time with some students before classes start.

Prayers

- * For the Lord's faithfulness in the return of all the Avanti workers and housemates
- * For the Lord's faithfulness in Miles and Meredith Thompson receiving their visas
- * For Jodi Luke's transition in moving to another city and working with a new group of believers
- * For the New Year- that we may make wise goals and carry them out responsibly
- * For the Lord's faithfulness in providing friendships and constructing relationships with readers, coworkers, and the believers in Italy

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.