

Avanti Italia!

Onward Italy!

Let's Stay Connected!

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In Psalms 40:8, the psalmist writes, "I take joy in doing your will, my God, for your instructions are written on my heart." For me, believing this does not come easy. Though I know the Lord's will is perfect, good, and better than my own, it is nonetheless a conscious effort to submit my will so that His may be done. Furthermore, it takes the uncomfortable dying of self to have one's character changed to share in the joyfulness of His plans. Submission and surrender are not pleasant in themselves, but without them I withhold the potential to live life joyfully in service to God. I battle discouragement moment by moment, but I know the promise of joy that comes from serving the Lord and the strength He provides to fight Satan's tactics to dishearten.

A New Term:

About the Readers and Classes

Classes resumed the 2nd week of January with a 'back to school' party in which we invited old and new students to mingle. Since I am finished with Italian Language School, I started teaching more students. I now hold 10 private sessions and 2 group grammar classes. This includes the students I met with last year. One of my new and notable sessions is with Silvia and her 4 year old son, Marco. Teaching a toddler is a new one for me, but it is a challenge that is a lot of fun to be a part of. We spend part of our time together

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"Back to School" Party with old and new Readers

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Miles (the one smiling) and his student, Allesandro



Me, Scott, and Becky in Lucca

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practicing words and singing songs in English before giving him something to play or color with so his mother and I can read and talk together. Silvia and most of the women I meet with individually have expressed an interest in studying women in the Bible. One of the challenges I had from the last term was breaking the apathy of my readers and encouraging them to invest in our lessons. Many of them come because of the English practice and not for the content of our studies. The days that we meet are for most of them the only days in which they pick up a Bible. This year I wanted to do more to present scripture to each of them in a way that appealed to them. These study suggestions included the life of Jesus, songs and poetry, Old Testament character stories, letters to the churches, women of the Bible, and more. With the exception of two readers, all chose to study a woman from the Bible. One of these other two women is studying the letters from Paul (we just finished Galatians and are moving into Ephesians), while the other is studying about spiritual warfare. I am very pleased by the piqued interests of my readers and am hopeful that their interests will continue to grow in studying God's Word.

Returns, Arrivals, and Visits

Along with the start of classes, we celebrated the return of Miles and Meredith Thompson. The Thompsons started with me but had to return to the States to reapply for their visas. They got them and now they're back in Italy! A new teacher, David Ezell, also arrived. To close out the month, the Avanti Italia Recruiter, Scott Harris,

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and his wife, Becky, also came for a visit. Scott was the first person I talked with about A.I. So much has happened since that first meeting with him! Their stay at the Bible school was definitely a source of encouragement to me. They care about our well-being and made a point to spend time with us individually to gain an insight into the challenges of living here. It is wonderful to be thought of and prayed for despite the distance.

January Events

On the first Thursday of every month the team has a large brainstorming meeting in which we discuss and plan the events for the month. These events include activities we have at the Bible school as well as other events with surrounding churches. For example, this month we organized a movie night and watched *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. These plans also include more physical activities like painting our library, which we finished this weekend. Sometimes we are fortunate to travel together. When Scott and Becky were with us, we visited Lucca for the day, a small medieval town an hour away from Florence. The following day, Jodi and I worshiped at the church in Vicenza, a two and a half hour train ride to northern Italy. Vicenza is where Jodi is hoping to move this summer to work with the church in that city. I was happy to meet the members she is eager to build her life with and to spend time in the city she is excited to make her home.

The Lord blesses me with gems of encouragement in small, yet monumental ways. The weekly interaction with my readers is one way. Another is through the plans we make as a team, or individually, with the various churches in Italy. For example, two weekends ago we hosted a meeting at the Bible school in which various church leaders from

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Eric, David, Jodi, myself, and Scott riding around Lucca



Movie Night at the Bible School

around Italy came to brainstorm and begin planning for summer camps and semi-annual retreats for the coming year. Though we are scattered, knowing that we are working alongside other believers to build up the kingdom of God is affirming.

As a team we've committed to praying for specific things to build our anticipation in seeing how the Lord will answer. Each prayer has a story, and though there is not enough space to share the details of each request, we all came to agree that these are pressing matters that we need to advocate. I ask that you add these to your prayers.

- * That Rosa, a woman who has been working at the Bible school for more than 20 years cooking and acting as a surrogate mother, may come to know the Lord.
- * That plans for outreach in Scandicci may blossom as we consider offering Italian worship services in the city we live in.
- * That our team may be united in all ways.
- * That the Lord would raise up leaders in the churches in Italy.
- * That Allesandro, a reader who has been studying at the Bible school for many years, would be relieved of doubt and come to know the Lord.

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.