

Avanti Italia!

Onward Italy!

Let's Stay Connected!

Email: morgannash11@gmail.com

(school address)
Scuola Biblica di Firenze
Via Armando Spadini, 24
50018 Scandicci (Fi)
Italy

Three times a week, the A.I. team meets in the morning to discuss the plans for the week(s) ahead. Included in this time are devotionals that we each take turns leading. We have spent the last few weeks focusing on the nature of service by leading discussion and sharing our thoughts on the scriptures we share in these meetings. It was fitting, then, that the Women's Retreat at the end of March was structured around service from Mark 10:45, "Jesus came to be served and not to be served." Though we attempt to live from Jesus' example, we still find areas of our lives in which we act selfishly and think of ourselves first. Thank God when He brings those hidden truths into our awareness that we may be humbled and persistent to change our attitude and behavior.

Physical Friday Projects

Spring is here and with it are longer days, warmer weather, and blossoming scenery. The birth of the New Year is growing into its youth, and it is beautiful. This is the time of year when we have multiple "Physical Fridays" in the month—days in which we work on improving the school's facilities. Summer will arrive in the blink of an eye. We are pressed for time to finish remodeling and fixing two bedrooms and two bathrooms.



Jodi working with some of our kids from the Library in Scandicci

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Remodeling is a process that hardly gets finished at one time—the bigger the project, the longer the process. I am new to this world of renovating and I have learned a lot about it, but I'm in no hurry to make it a hobby of mine. Along with working on the rooms, we have spent much time readying our garden for the year. With the small window of time to prepare the soil and plant, we needed to work quickly.

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Jodi and the kids from the library



Meredith working with some of our kids from Sunday School

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Though I don't know much about gardening, I enjoy learning about it, and I find satisfaction in working outside. We are hopeful to get these large projects done, the garden and the remodeling of the four rooms, before summer. When we are finished with classes for the summer the Bible School houses a variety of study abroad groups. Finishing these projects before then will make for a much more comfortable experience for everyone living in the Bible School during that time.

English Activities at the Library

In the fall and spring semester, the Harding study abroad group in Florence organizes English activities for the children at the library in Scandicci where we live. When they are away for free travel, the A.I team fills in for them in their absence. These English activities are every Friday afternoon for an hour, and this month we organized the activities for two Fridays. We never know exactly how many kids will show up or what their acquisition level will be, but it is always a fun experience. In the time that we have with them we read a story, explaining pieces of it in Italian and asking comprehension questions, and then we finish the hour with games and activities about the story. The kids are usually between the ages of six and ten years old. Many of the kids come regularly, but it is never the exact same group week to week. Though many of my weekly responsibilities are with children (e.g. 3 year-old Marco and Sunday School), most of the A.I. team works only with adults. Getting to spend time with the kids at the library is one of the few opportunities that each member of our team can try their hand at working with a different age group. The more student diversity I get to

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work with the more experience I gain and the more assured I am of my capability to teach to a variety of groups. I believe these benefits apply to the rest of our team as well.

The Women's Retreat

We are entering the season of church retreats. The first of these was marked by the Women's Retreat the last weekend of March. Held in Velletri, a city near Rome, most of the female A.I. workers drove together with some of the women from the church in Florence and Prato, a neighboring city. This retreat is a nationwide retreat for any of the women in the Churches of Christ in Italy. In attendance were women from northern Italy (e.g. Milan and Padova) to southern Italy (e.g. Catagna). We also had a variety of nationalities represented besides Italian, including American, Japanese, Honduran, Guatemalan, and Mexican. The diversity among the women was a reminder of the binding love of Christ—one that is strong, blind to difference, but uniting because of his great love. Though the retreat was brief, the weekend offered a good opportunity to meet more believers and gain encouragement from one another.

Spring Travel

I am very excited to think ahead about my little visit back to the States during the month of May to visit family and friends. I have had moments of homesickness, which makes the anticipation of coming home just that much more thrilling. I will first fly into North Carolina for Zach's (my boyfriend) graduation and then will make my way to Oklahoma. I will be in Oklahoma from May 17th-June 3rd. Mark your calendars. It's going to be great!



Our Sunday School Board

“Ogni persona é un fiocco di neve ed ogni fiocco é unica davanti a Dio.”

(which roughly translates)

“Every person is like a snowflake, and every snowflake is unique from God.”



Our Sunday School Class learning about Christ's first miracle

Our Team 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.