

# *Avanti Italia!*

## *Onward Italy!*

### Let's Stay Connected!

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I am greatly encouraged in knowing that all the good that is done for the gospel is never in vain. The writer to the Colossians creates an image of the Good News as living, powerful, active throughout the world, and in many ways self-sufficient. "This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. It is bearing fruit everywhere by changing lives, just as it changed your lives from the day you first heard and understood the truth about God's wonderful grace (Col. 1:6)." During this change in season, let us take notice of nature's rebirth—the faithful return of roots and blossoms—and be reminded that the Lord's Good News works in the same way. The gospel is living. We can feel a sense of relief knowing that the gospel is not dependent on us, and yet, we can be just as thankful that we are still invited to have a part in it.

### ***Work at the School***

We are really fortunate to live in a house that can cater to large groups of people. Earlier this month we had AIM workers (Adventures in Missions) from Ireland stay with us, and it was no problem putting them up for a few nights because of the spaciousness of our facility. However, it is an old building, and therefore requires additional upkeep. Lately our attention has been on completing the two bedrooms and four bathrooms on the top floor. The walls and ceilings in these rooms had many cracks and damages. Fixing them required the lengthy process of chipping/hammering away pieces of decaying parts of wall and ceiling, sanding and spackling the damaged area, sanding again, priming, and applying a few coats of paint. I have written about this project before and, as is typical when renovating, it has required many hours and days to finish it correctly



So much to paint!

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Little by little we continue to get closer to having them finished. In other news, the garden that we replanted is coming along nicely. It is a shared responsibility and we all take turns watering and checking on it. As of right now, plant shoots and leaves are sprouting. These are small encouragements to a job well done.

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Our growing garden!



The Florentine Football Team

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Britton Road Church of Christ  
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Oklahoma City, OK 73120

In addition to our typical teaching schedule, our team made time this last month to visit the nearby nursing home and write cards to people. Besides working on physical projects, we do not often have the chance to work on other things together as a team. Some services, like visiting people or writing encouraging notes, do not require much work—it is not like planting a garden or fixing a room. They do require willingness and a positive attitude. These relaxed types of services have cultivated better relationships within our group. As a result, we have made sweet memories of our time together by doing what is good.

At the beginning of every month, we have a meeting in which we brainstorm how to better work together, serve in our area, and talk about the future months. Much of our April meeting included the logistics of the coming summer months—scheduling physical work weeks, summer camp, and vacation days. One of the things discussed was hosting a lunch for the coaches of a traveling sports camp. David and Miles have become involved with an American-style football team in Florence. This team is made up of Italian men who are interested in playing American football. The coaches of this team are American Christians who use sports as an outreach tool. In April, the American coaches had invited a mission organization called Athletes in Action to host a sports camp for a few days. This organization travels around the world working with local missionaries to create sports camps. The mission groups include coaches from around the US who want to help in this way. David and Miles expressed an interest in our meeting together, so we had a team of fourteen football coaches over for lunch. Fourteen football coaches means a lot of food! It was fun having them over. We were able to share our experiences as well as hear about theirs.

### ***In the Lives of the Workers***

As mentioned earlier, our team has to be intentional about spending time together. Though most of us live together, it is very easy to get caught up in our individual work routines.

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There is a careful balance in how we spend our time and how much of it we spend together. Something that the women in our team like to do is cook. Last year, Jodi and I took a cooking class with some of the Harding study abroad students and loved our time together. This semester she and I, along with Jessica and Meredith, went with the Harding students and learned how to make some authentic Italian cuisine. I probably will never make homemade noodles again, but the time we spent together having fun was invaluable.

Many in our group are taking their summer vacations at different times. Jodi actually just left a few days ago for the States. While we were all still in one place, we planned a weekend getaway to Lake Como to relax and spend some time together. We stayed in Domaso, a little city at the very northern part of the lake. I had never been so far north in Italy, and it was wonderful getting to see the towering mountains surrounding the lake. Miles, Meredith, David, and I spent a day by bike exploring the city and just enjoying the outside. We had a perfectly sunny, cool day to be there, and it was just the right thing to do before wrapping up our classes for the semester.

It is important for me to share the news of what is happening in the individual lives of our workers, even if it is only briefly. Miles and David have spent a significant amount of their time working with the American-style football team in Florence. They go to practices, hang out with the team, and go to the games. Some of the players have started coming to English classes or have expressed an interest in studying at the Bible School at some point. This is encouraging to us, but especially Miles and David. Jodi and I have continued our Italian language learning by seeing a private tutor. Together, the three of us meet once a week for two hours to increase our fluency. I have come to really enjoy these meetings. They continue to increase my confidence when I use the language, even though I make a lot of mistakes. It is also a way for me and Jodi to spend time together outside of the Bible School and in the culture.

Other miscellaneous news includes Miles and Meredith's visitors from the States. For a few days they played 'tour guide' for some friends of theirs from school. I know they enjoyed getting to share some of their life here with them. Jodi left to go back to the States for a few weeks. I will miss having someone to chat and share coffee with, but I will get to do that soon enough when I make my trip back to the States shortly. Also, Eric celebrated a birthday in April. He and Jessica took a short trip to celebrate.



Learning how to make pasta with the Harding students



Enjoying our day exploring by bicycle

*In these next few days, I am most looking forward to my trip to the States. I am so excited to see family and friends! I will be back in Oklahoma late Saturday evening on the 16<sup>th</sup> and will be in town until June 4<sup>th</sup>. I intend to worship at Britton Road Church of Christ on the Sundays and Wednesdays that I am in town, but let me know about making additional plans during that time. My main objective is just to spend time with people.*

### *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.