

Avanti Italia!

Onward Italy!

Let's Stay Connected!

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An often referred to piece in Ecclesiastes begins with, "For everything there is a time...". In this third chapter the author describes the ebb and flow of life as seasons, periods of time set to change. I have entered into a season of change and am reminded that nothing stays the same for long. All things come to an end for new things to begin. My return to Florence for the summer is an ending, and with this season I aim to make the most of my final months. I had such an enjoyable and relaxing time in the States that I was sad to leave and come back to work. Saying goodbye, even in the best of circumstances, is never easy, but maybe the difficulty in parting ways comes from a place of bonded love. Once I arrived in Florence, though, I was greeted by the friendly faces of Eric, Jessica, Jodi, and Rosa. It is easier to discard feelings of sadness in the company of good people. Although I was sad to leave, I have been happy to return to my friendships with coworkers and students in Italy.

Summer Work at the Bible School

The work did not stop while I was gone, but it did take a different turn of direction. Towards the end of May a group of study abroad students from Harding University took up residence with us into the month of June. For them, and for the groups that came later, the Bible School transformed into a type of Bed & Breakfast. During their stay we took care of their meals, and took care of maintaining public and private spaces within the school.



Serving a final meal to our house guests

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Needless to say, running a hotel takes a lot of work, and I have a new sense of appreciation for anyone endeavoring in that kind of work. Soon after they left another group of people came to stay, but unlike the students this group was a mixture of ages touring Italy.

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Meal Prep: Jodi, Matt, and David on breakfast duty



Miles and David working with the kids at the Library

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Their stay with us was only for a few days and they were a smaller group from the Lewisville Church of Christ in Texas. They were led by Terry and Brandon Edwards, the former having been the Bible School Director years past. Brandon spent his childhood in Italy and eventually became an A.I. worker at the school long after his family returned to the States. These two men were wonderful encouragements to be around, and their intercultural experiences were inspiring. Not all of our work was playing host. Though we are taking a break from having classes for the summer, we are still involved in working at the Scandicci Library a few times a month. The summer is no exception to learning, and parents seem more than eager to send their kids to our classes. This last week we introduced them to Playdough, which was a hit.

Extra Summer Visitors

Besides the groups, we have also had a variety of visitors at the Bible School. My first weekend back Jodi and I took a train to Venice to pick up her friend, Natasha Hudnell, from the airport. We shared our room with her, and she played a big part in helping us take care of the study abroad students who were staying at the school when she arrived. Even though I had not known her before, she was an easy friend to make and share a few experiences with. Soon after she left a former A.I. worker and later director, Jay Walls, brought a campaign group through Florence. Though they did not stay with us, we did spend time with them through the activities they planned that served the church: Bible studies, VBS, and a musical concert. In their short time here they did a lot, and their enthusiasm with the campaign was contagious to be around.

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Lastly, Peter McGraw, another former A.I. worker, made a stop by Florence on his way home from working at an archeological site in Israel. It has been insightful learning about past workers and directors' experiences with the Bible School and in Italy. Their visits are testaments to the outreach work that continues in Italy.

Summer Classes

The summer is erratic at the school with changing routines and responsibilities. Some weeks are heavy with work, but then others are not. Even though as a school we do not hold official classes, I still meet with a handful of readers weekly to provide myself with some structure during the "off" weeks. Easily, my favorite part of the job is meeting with readers for Bible study and language practice. The good thing about having weeks with less work is that I get to spend more time with readers, and sometimes this takes place through exploring more of Florence and Scandicci. In fact, a few weeks ago, my reader Lorena organized a day trip open to the community through the hills of Scandicci. During this hike she explained significant and historical features of our location. The day was concluded with a picnic on the hills overlooking our city. It was a nice time with a lovely friend.



Jay Walls and the campaign group performing in their concert



My reader, Lorena (woman with the megaphone), giving instructions and information about our hike

I think often of my return back to the States, and with these thoughts are sprinklings of worries mostly about how I will support myself and how I will get around. I would appreciate your prayers in transitioning back home, especially that I make wise decisions in finding work and a car. Thank you, as always, for letting me share glimpses of my life and for making yourself a part of this experience here.

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.