

Ministry Update from Reggio Calabria, Italy

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Dear Family of God,

Our life as missionaries has great high-mountain-top and deep low-valley experiences alternating. The Word helps us keep the balance; looking onto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Through Him, we are encouraged to continue to pursue. Let me share some of these stories with you.

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God connects us with people through amazing situations and circumstances. Divine enthusiasm runs over us with every new connection. We are zealous in pursuing to spend time with our new friends and share the good news with them. We often read the Bible together, pray with them and for them, expecting God to draw them to repentance. We hope for a great outcome. Sadly, most of these connections turn away after the first meeting or even with time just fade away. Nevertheless, we have seen true change in some cases, especially with those of addictions or serious family problems. Joy however seems to last only for a while. True and lasting victory lies in prayer without ceasing.

So is the case of Simone. He has spent a very intensive month with us both working and studying the word of God. He abandoned his addictions from one day to another. The pale, skinny, depressed boy returned home with a round, smiling face, strong and healthy both physically and spiritually. Seeing the change in him, his sister gave up her addictions. Two months later, their mother left her lover and returned to the family.

One weekend in November, Simone came to visit us. We made a feast. He made some of our neighbors - where he worked in the summer - happy too by his visit. He was well; working, attending church and the youth group meetings regularly, living free of addictions and helping his sister too. As time passed, Simone found new difficulties; living alone, finding a job, attending church regularly, being accountable towards his family. Even though Carlo kept regularly in touch with him, his addiction slowly started creeping back into his life. It might not be as bad as it was before, but he is living in compromise. Carlo continues to call him to encourage and counsel. (On picture: Giovanni and Simone)



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The great excitement about making friends with Giovanni Vizzari has calmed down. All that time sharing and reading the Bible for one whole year had seemingly no effect. He acknowledges the truth, but wouldn't take that U-turn necessary for a changed life. We shared with his entire family.

One of Giovanni's sons is about to get married and start his own family. Even though in the Calabrese culture the family provides the home for the newlyweds and supports them in many ways, living is very difficult. The universities are producing thousands of graduates, but there are no jobs. Most of these young people go to Nord Italy or elsewhere in Europe in search of a job, where living is very expensive. Once they succeed, most all their monthly earnings they'll spend for the necessary expenses (rent, utilities, food). There is no chance to save up and start a family. Since they don't see connection between their religion and this economic problem, Jesus is not worth their time. This is a great dilemma in this society. Even believers struggle with it. Our heavenly Father knows but what we are in need of.

Just as Jesus encouraged his disciples to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to them so is it for us. Of course the real gap is between religion and relationship. They work their way to heaven trying to earn God's mercy by good deeds. Instead of recognizing the sinful, hopeless man on the inside and receiving forgiveness onto salvation in the finished work on the cross.

However, God has opened the door to the town of San Roberto, and continues to open doors to other families as well. Like the elderly couple Nunzio and Lucy. He is Calabrese, she is German. They live in Canada for six months, than they fly over to Italy for another six. We met them many years ago, but as we professed faith in Jesus, we were kicked out. God brought us together again for a good purpose. We found out that we very much share the same faith. They were only cautious in the past sending us away, because many have taken advantage of them. Since then, Carlo helps them in the garden. They enjoy our company and we simply enjoy English conversation with them. We often discuss how our faith made a difference in the way we raise our children and view the challenges of life.

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The church in Bagnara is full. Last summer, Nigerian immigrants started coming to our Sunday services. Since they speak English, we give them the space to worship in their language and translate the teaching. This is quite a change for the Italian brothers, but they embrace the new fellows and their strange language well. Most of these Nigerians have either Pentecostal or Catholic backgrounds. Each one has to learn to respect the different ways of doing church. Over all, the blood of Jesus makes us one family, even though we might be used to worshipping God through various ways. Truly, we know that all

things work together for good to those who love God and are the called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). Our testimony, making a difference in the city of Bagnara can go out only when we love one another as Christ has loved us. God is doing a much-needed unifying work in the midst of us.

Since we had the blessing of Anthony and Darlene teaching our children to play the guitar last summer, we wanted to put it to use. In December, our children started playing worship songs before the Sunday service. They continue to practice and prepare for every Sunday.

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The Italian government deals with the immigrants (most of them coming from Africa) differently, based on each one's situation. Some live in camps, some are part of a project, some who received their documents are free to work and travel. In the midst of these Nigerian sisters in Bagnara, the first one we met was Precious. She was moved than shortly after our meeting to San Roberto to be a part of one of those projects. There, we met her husband, Sylvester and other Nigerian believers. The municipality provide a small apartment for each in the project. Since Sylvester and Precious live downstairs and Benedetta with her baby boy, Cristian upstairs, we asked if they would want to do a home-bible-study. Since last December, we go to church in Bagnara Sunday mornings and have a home-bible-study in San Roberto in the afternoon. We meet in Sylvester's apartment and sometimes a Muslim woman joins us too.





In this intimate setting of bible study, we have the blessing and privilege to get to know our fellow Nigerian believers, hear their adventurous stories of voyage to Italy, get to know about their country, culture and cuisine. We invited some of them for Christmas. They were amazed by the beauty of the mountains and saw snow for the first time in their life. (On picture: Carlo, kids and Sylvester)

Sylvester suffered an injury on the way to Italy and had back surgery. Currently he is in a wheelchair and receiving therapy to walk again. With the blessing of our Fiat Doblo, we can comfortably carry others with us. We go to San Roberto Sunday morning, pick up

Benedetta and her baby, than we go to Campo Calabro and pick up Benedetta's friend and baby, than all together, we go to church in Bagnara. After church, we bring them home, arrange some lunch, and have a bible study at Sylvester in the afternoon. As much as the Sunday program is demanding, it is a great blessing for all of us. (On picture: Sunday lunch by Mariella)



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The women's weekly prayer meeting is stable and constant. Since our churches have not had bible studies for women these last two years, and we desired to have fellowship in the Word, we prayed about it. We started a once-a-month bible study last November. They asked me to prepare for these meetings. We are studying the book of James.

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Our children experience the goodness of God first hand. He meets our basic needs and provides even some of the children's desire just to strengthen their faith and show that He is very much alive. There are times when the children have to give up something precious, but God replaces it later with another, much better. They notice how much difference Jesus makes in their lives; they are often discriminated, bullied and teased because of it. Discussing these incidents than at home gives them an affirmation and a continued encouragement, that it is ok to be different.

We continue helping the children of Melia with their English homework. We started our English class late this year, because the schoolbooks arrived two months later than usual. Those kids, who used to be on the piazza and often did various mischiefs, have disappeared. We are not bothered during class anymore.

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Please continue to keep us in your prayers, lifting up the Brethren fellowship in Bagnara Calabria (help with worship), the English class in Melia, our personal one-on-one relationships and our family. We pray for healing for the sick, and for salvation for all.

We appreciate and thank for your prayers and support. It means a lot to us to know that you back us up. We are thankful to be co-laborer with you in the Gospel in this corner of the world. You are welcome to visit us or be a part of this ministry. May God's Spirit strengthen us all in these last times to finish well.

With love,

The Nicolos

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