

The EDWARDS in ITALY
OVERVIEW – MAY 2007 – MARCH 2008

Seeking the Lost

Chiesa di Cristo di Catania
Via Roccaromana 33
Catania, Sicilia, Italia
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It's hard to believe that March 2008 is already coming to an end. It seems like just yesterday that I was flying back from China to surprise Kristin and ask her to marry me. I look back on our wedding, our plans, our dreams, and I am amazed by the incredible blessings that God has showered upon us. I am constantly awed by God's plans and power in our lives. So much has happened in this brief, yet eventful, time.

First of all, Kristin and I would both like to thank you for your prayers, cards, boxes, emails, and support during our time here in Italy . You have made our time here so much easier as we have been inundated by the support of both our families and our church families. Kristin sends her personal thanks to the ladies class at Westside who sent her the wonderful box of Christmas decorations that really made our season more like "home". Again, we can't thank everyone enough, from both Westside and College, for your incredible support and love. Thank you!

Avanti Italia

So, where to begin?

Kristin and I spent the first four months, from May to September, at the Florence Bible School getting settled into the Italian lifestyle and culture. During those first months, Kristin went to language school in downtown Florence. She rode the bus everyday downtown and spent 5 hours a day, 5 days a week, for two months learning Italian and being inundated with the Italian way of life. Her school was right next to the incredible Florence cathedral called "Il Duomo" and she felt inspired everyday as she went to school.

My time was spent with new English and Bible students at the Bible school. Already knowing the culture and language, I jumped into the work and found myself having to adjust. Having spent the better part of two years in China , it was very different talking to an Italian who grew up Catholic than it was to talk to a Chinese who was atheist by tradition. I had to adjust a lot of my studies and thoughts around a very religious, tradition filled society where tradition is often more important than truth. It was a challenge to say the least! My main student ,Luigi, owns a restaurant in Florence . Our first few studies were difficult as I felt like little was being accomplished. Eventually, he confided that he had used our free English courses as an excuse to have someone to talk to about his life, his faith, and his loneliness. We covered a lot of topics together including evolution, Christ, love, marriage, faith, creation, salvation, and baptism. He is continuing his studies and, now that I have moved away, we continue to stay in touch. Please pray for Luigi.

THE NEXT STEP: CATANIA

During our time in Citerna we madetwo different trips to visit other local congregations who had requested Avanti Italia workers. I visited with the Viale Jonio Chiesa di Cristo in Rome to see about the possibility of working alongside of them for the remainder of our time in Italy . A few

weeks later, we both flew down to Sicily and spent a week with the brothers and sisters in Catania to check out the possibility of being the first Avanti workers in Sicily in 20 years. After much prayer and deliberations, we decided to take a leap of faith and move down to Sicily to begin a brand new work.

We moved into our apartment in Catania on November 27th. During our visit we had been blessed to find an apartment that was only 10 blocks from the church building. This was a huge blessing, as the church building is in the old historic center of town and apartments this close are hard to find. This allowed me to save money as I can walk to work instead of having to take a bus or buy a car. Having our apartment so close to the church building also helps in being able to invite people often and it's just a short walk from the building. We live on the 10th floor and have an amazing view of the volcano and the ocean. It's great to live so high, as these apartments usually cost less, but when the elevators are not working, which happens, it's not quite so wonderful!

Once we arrived in Catania, I spent time talking with the brothers and sisters of the church to see what it is that we could really do to get some new ministries off the ground. I wanted to see where the best areas for us to focus would be. After much discussion, and two different church meetings, we decided to do five new ministries:

We would:

1. Begin offering free English lessons using the Bible and basic English as a Second Language courses. As of right now we do this at our main building but we are hoping to expand it to our second church building in the future to allow more people to attend these free lessons.
2. Help translate materials for the church website. This involves translating sermons, lessons, Bible correspondence courses, and more to be put in the church website database.
3. Teach a "music class". This consists of me trying to teach four part harmonies to our hymns. The Italians all tend to sing just the melody. This was a request of many of the members.
4. Keep the doors of the church building open. We have arranged to have someone at the church building 8 hours a day, 6 days a week for walk ins, visitors, and studies. Generally I am there in the morning from 8-12, and then in the afternoon a brother or sister comes. In the afternoons I hold Bible studies and offer English lessons. Sundays we are all there together.
5. Be involved in the teaching of classes, preaching, and encouraging of all members.

! We spent a great Christmas period with the church family here and we soon found ourselves in the new year., We spent a day in January distributing our new "Free English lessons". From this distribution, I now have 7 full time students which cover about 20 hours a week of English lesson/Bible lessons.

MY STUDENTS

My students are as diverse as they come. I have one college student named Salvatore who is a strong Catholic. Salvatore is studying English and Spanish at his university and is brilliant. Our studies continue and he has slowly started to open up about himself in the past few lessons. Pray for Salvatore.

Xin is a Chinese girl who migrated here with her family three years ago. She speaks French, Chinese, Italian, and now wants to learn English. She's 18 and her family is Buddhist by tradition but they are not practicing. My time in China has really helped with talking to her. I have actually been to her home town (Shanghai) and have been able to use my little Chinese with her. Pray for Xin and her family.

Belinda is a 38 year old married woman who did two semester abroad programs while in college, based in England, and wanted to start back up her English study after many years away from it. She came in EXTREMELY skeptical of our free lessons because they were based out of a church. She wanted assurances that we were not some type of cult. I spent almost the whole first

lesson just explaining who we were and that we weren't either Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons). After this LONG discussion in which I was able to talk a lot about scripture and who we were, she confessed that she felt very at ease with us and who we are. Our lessons have gone very well and she has continued to ask more and more questions about the church and why we are different from Catholicism. Pray for Belinda and her walk towards faith.

Giorgia is a 16 year old girl whose parents and family are members of the church here. She is a brilliant girl who loves English, Highschool Musical, and the Sister Act movies. Kristin gives her English lessons (as her English is very advanced) and they have struck up quite a friendship. Giorgia is also studying with one of the members here, Stefano Scibiglia, and myself as she has made known her interest in being baptized. We are really excited about the possibility of having Giorgia as a sister soon. Pray for Giorgia and her walk with Christ.

OTHER WORKS IN CATANIA

I have begun translating different materials for the church website and it's a slow work. The more students we get, the less time I will be able to spend on it. However, in slow times, vacations, and other down times, it is something I can do from home. Check out the website at www.chiesadicristo.it. We'd love any comments or suggestions.

On Tuesday nights we have begun a "music class". This is mostly just Kristin and I trying to teach some of the members about the different parts to music and our hymns. Most of the hymns here are translations from American hymns so it's not too hard. I'm not trained to do this at all but it's something that was requested and so Kristin and I do our best to help with this time together. More than anything, we have come to enjoy getting together and singing songs with the brothers, sisters, and getting to know them better on a personal level. This time has become so much more than I could have hoped for and it's been a wonderful blessing.

On Thursday nights we have our weekly Bible study together at 7 o'clock. Stefano Scibiglia is coming to the end of a series on Revelations and I will be taking over in mid-April to give him a break from teaching every week (he has taught this class for three years). After seeing what the church wanted to study, I have decided to do a class on how to teach others about Christ. We have many different topics off of this main one. Each week will hopefully grow towards all members feeling confident enough to share their faith with any and all who ask. I hope that this will help stimulate the church into a healthy growth both spiritually, in confidence, and from this, in numbers.

I have also been put in the preaching rotation. The church here in Catania has a large group of capable men and I'm very happy to say that they all are doing a wonderful job. Not having a full time preacher really does push all to stand up and take responsibility for their faith. The church has hired Stefano Spina, who will move here in May, to work with the church. He, however, has been hired as an evangelist and not as a preacher. He will work full time on evangelism and also be put into the preaching rotation. As of right now, I have been preaching about once a month. It has been a blessing to me and I hope also to the members here.

As to keeping the church building open, this has actually been a wonderful thing for the church. I was skeptical as to how much it would really help. However, myself being there most mornings and afternoons, it has surprised me how many different people have stopped by and asked questions. This has really raised the visibility of the church here which we hope will allow us to evangelize to more and more people as we seek to do God's will.

NEW CHRISTIANS!

During our time here in Catania, we have been blessed with three new additions to the church family. Salvo, future son-in-law of Stefano Scibiglia, Vittoria D'arrigo, daughter of one of our members, and Nicoletta, a 17 year old girl from town, have all been added in baptism to the church family. We rejoice with them and their new walk with Christ. They are all faithful members

who have become instantly active and Kristin and I feel so blessed to have them in our lives.

Again, we cant thank you all enough for your continued support and love during our time here in Catania . We are blessed to be able to work alongside all of you. Your continued support is not just a support of us, but a continued support of these wonderful brothers and sister in Christ in Catania who are striving to be what God has called them to be. We could not do this work without you! We extend an open invitation to all to come over and visit us in our home in Catania . We would love a visit! Kristin always enjoys it when someone who speaks English comes around.

If you would like to get our monthly email updates, please send me an email at:

Bkedwardsinitaly@yahoo.com or visit our blogsite at bkedwardsinitaly.blogspot.com

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We love and miss you all,

In HIM we live and move and have our being,

Brandon and Kristin Edwards

(and little one on the way!)