



## The Gravino Family

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*The things which you have heard in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 2 Tim. 2:2*

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## A Truth Worth Remembering

What are some key ingredients to a successful ministry? What lies behind our labor as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries? I recently had the joy of meditating upon such questions and thoughts in preparation to preach my first sermon at the Italian Theological Academy as the new Resident Director. In 1 Corinthians 2 the Apostle Paul writes, "And when I came to you brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God (1Co 2:1-5)." The answer as Scripture demonstrates is a ministry done in weakness and dependence. The key lies in the recognition of our own weakness and our own dependence upon the Spirit and power of God.

This truth has both encouraged us much as a family throughout our first three months of life in Sicily and marked out my ministry at ITA and the church of Acireale.

## A Culture Worth Reaching



Our move to Sicily, I must admit, has been our most challenging relocation thus far. Rome, though a mission field no doubt, was very familiar to us. We (Alexandra and I) lived there for about five years prior to moving to California for seminary. Rome is also where our home church family is as well. We now feel like "true missionaries" as awkward as this expression sounds. Our ministry is Italy wide. Our immediate living circumstance, however, makes it such that for the very first time we are living in and reaching with the Gospel an "unknown" and "unfamiliar" context.

Sicily, though still very much Italy, has a richness and tradition all its own. This ranges from the history, landscape (the striking beauty of the island, particularly the eastern coast and Etna, the seemingly ever-present live volcano towering above all life here), the food (much better than the mainland! Try the "Norma"), language (I need translation in order to understand Sicilian dialect), religion (Roman Catholicism is much more rooted here than Rome itself, particularly the worship of Mary) and the people (friendly and hospitable, not to mention very hard working, BUT shrewd and suspicious).

A recent newspaper article was entitled, "This city needs to be saved." The title naturally caught my eye and I tuned in to read it. I was somewhat disappointed to learn that its content had nothing to do with the true spiritual and biblical meaning of the term "saved" at all. What it did say was nonetheless truly revealing for me as I was given a greater understanding of the unique challenges that face us as we minister here.

The writer spoke of the need to win the city of Catania (one of the region's major cities) back from the reign of organized crime. The city's law enforcement had just averted a war between two clans (families) arresting 40 bosses. The spiritual darkness we are serving in is overwhelmingly strong and dark. From a spiritual standpoint the writer of the article is right. Sicilians need to be saved, but it is with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.



We are so thankful in this regard for our church plant in the city of Acireale (about a half-hour from Catania). The church is growing wonderfully and the word appears to be spreading that our church in Acireale teaches biblical “meat”. For this we rejoice and thank the Lord for His grace in allowing us to be a part of this (His) work. I have the joy of preaching through Ephesians at this time on Sunday mornings and I am leading a men's study twice a month on Friday nights.

## A Church Worth Training

The Italian Theological Academy has completed its final class for 2009! The Academy is but another striking reminder of the Lord's goodness to Italy, particularly His goodness in wanting to help the many numerically small and struggling churches throughout the country by training their leadership.

I was recently struck by the quality of the preaching I heard from students in our expository preaching program. The students, though clearly needing to grow and further develop their preaching, had grasped the essential principles and displayed them in their sermons. Once again I rejoice and am humbled to be a part of this great work the Lord is doing through the Academy in Italy.

I am also thankful for the blessing of having ITA be a part of the Master's Academy International (TMAI). TMAI is a wonderful network of academies around the globe holding the same doctrinal and ministry convictions and doing the work of equipping the local church in the various countries they are ministering in. Soon I will have the privilege of going to Zurich for the first ever European meeting of the TMAI academies. This will be an important time for me to become better acquainted with the training ministries of the other schools serving in Europe along with strengthening the common bond and work each of us is doing in equipping the national church in our respective countries.

Joining ITA this year in reaching the Italian church was Aurora Mission's annual FOCUS Conference (a national pastor's conference for Italian church leaders held this past October). This year's theme was “Sola Fide and Sola Gratia.” About 300 leaders and others were in attendance from all over Italy for a week of preaching and teaching from the Word of God and great fellowship. In the Lord's will and providence, a reformation may come to Italy after all.



## A Family Worth Rejoicing

Our third child is expected to arrive on the 15th of January. We are without doubt thankful and excited. He is a boy! Giuliano (or Julian for the English version) is doing thus far very well. Alexandra is persevering, but hoping to get to January 15th as soon as possible! I must say however (though she would probably not think so) that she is as radiant and beautiful as ever. Samuel, about to turn four in February, recently started kindergarten. It is so much fun to see him interact with the other children in his class. He is developing quite a Sicilian accent. Maddalena will soon be turning two in January. She is quite the little lady. Alexandra and I, amidst the disobedience and discipline, have many laughs watching the two of them play together and entertain us.



We do solicit your prayers. We are at this time in need of broadening our financial support base. We look to the Lord in faith for this need as with all others trusting in His sovereign, providential, and blessed provision.

We never cease to be so thankful for and humbled by your profound love in the Lord, your prayers, and your gracious support for us and our ministry in Italy. We certainly enjoy hearing from you as well so please whenever possible send us a greeting!

With much love in Christ,

*Johnny and Alexandra Gravino, Samuele, Maddalena & Giuliano*  
*2 Cor. 5:9*