

The Gravino Family

Aurora Mission
 P.O. Box 1549
 Bradenton, FL 34206
 (941)748-4100 Tel
 (941)748-2625 Fax
 www.auroramission.org
 jgravino@gmail.com



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



May 2010

GRAVINO GREETINGS From... Sicily

One Year Down... Many More To Go!!!

This past January 15th our family celebrated a little milestone. That date marks our one year anniversary on the mission field. One year *in Italy!* Throughout this time, as some of you may recall, we have experienced life and ministry in Rome and then (and now) in Sicily. Much could be said concerning the past year; the highs (the birth of Giuliano... our third child on the 6th of January of this year; preaching and teaching in our home church in Rome and at the Italian Theological Academy in Sicily; attending the Shepherd's Conference in Southern California and the Master's Academy Europe Summit in Zurich, Switzerland), the lows (dealing with the bureaucracy in Sicily) and just the plain routine (day to day work at the ITA office). What clearly stands out and towers above all is God's grace. This grace has marked our lives individually, as a family, and in our ministry. It has been evidenced even in your own faithful support for us along the way through your prayers, encouragement, and sacrificial giving. We are humbled, thankful, and, as the above sub-heading declares, *eager for... many more years to go...!*



A Necessary Biblical Alternative

One year of ministry has also given me further exposure to the Evangelical Church in Italy. It is my general impression thus far that a significant part of the church here is very heavily rooted in tradition. *Denominations* and *creeds* appear to rule the day rather than a fresh exposition and continual study of the Word of God. Sadly, the church becomes fossilized and hardened in its way. There is a reluctance to progress further into God's truth and hence be truly transformed into His likeness. It is not unheard of for a believer to be told by one or perhaps more elders from his church something like the following: "I know that's what the Bible says but you know our tradition..." It is also not uncommon for the leadership of a church to spurn theological education and study. In this regard I will never forget the story of a believer I met upon our arrival last summer to Sicily. His apparent study of the Scriptures had led him erroneously to believe that a Christian could lose his salvation. Surprisingly enough not one leader, elder or missionary, within his church context could prove to him otherwise from the Scriptures. For the most part reiterated to him was the fact that a believer *could not lose* his salvation. This is what *they* believed and he just had to accept it as that. Disturbed by this circumstance my heart wept for him. In many ways, though in error, he at least had done the right thing search and study the Scriptures... His actions were more admirable than the attitudes of many of his leaders in the so-called *sound camp*.

In the midst of this seemingly static and sterile spiritual environment there is a need for a biblical alternative. The Italian Theological Academy is steadily providing that necessary biblical alternative. Our work at ITA is centered on *training that transforms...* It involves taking those leaders, within the Italian church, that the Lord draws to us and bringing them *deeper* into God's truth through the *theology, expository preaching, biblical counseling*, and the several other disciplines taught throughout our academic year. The intended results of this process are men of God transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit in their knowledge, convictions, biblical theology and practical ministry outlook. Such trained men as a result transform many other lives that are present in the



churches, Italy wide, that they minister in. I have the joy of witnessing this growing phenomenon first-hand along with the sober responsibility of faithfully ensuring that the work proceeds. One of my favorite parts of the *job* is my frequent rapport and interaction with the students. What a privilege to be used by the Lord in spiritually influencing a life that will in turn spiritually influence many other lives throughout Italy. For more information on ITA please visit www.auroramission.org or www.auroraita.org.

Life on the Sicilian End of Things

Life on the Sicilian end of things has been much more challenging than expected. One prominent example of this is our attempt since September of 2009 to set up a basic residential phone line in our current home. The Italian Telecom company has since the beginning behaved in the most unprofessional ways possible. It has routinely sent technicians to our home who often arrive (*if they show up at all*) and after a less than five minute inspection of the premises depart simply to say that we will hear back from them. At times days and at other times weeks pass before we finally receive another appointment. Days prior to the new appointment they communicate that the appointment has been rescheduled. To this day, more than 6 months later, we still await our residential phone line and related internet service with no hope of receiving it anytime soon. The appointments, no shows, and excuses from Italian Telecom continue to come our way. All this, interestingly enough, comes after the fact that it took us nearly three months to receive basic electricity to light our home. We had to live on borrowed power during the initial move into our house. There are many more stories similar to these that I could recount but I will spare you the heartache or better yet, *headache*.

There is, I believe, an important spiritual lesson to learn from all of this that the Lord is teaching our family and myself primarily. The lesson concerns the heart, *my heart*, particularly in the areas of *bitterness and resentment*. I admit to you that throughout it all there have been several moments where contempt for my place of ministry has characterized my demeanor. I have had to repeatedly go before the Lord in repentance. The main issue one struggles with during moments like these is how not to be provoked and dragged down in the *mud* of it all. The principal human instruments the Lord has used to comfort me in times such as these have been *first and foremost*, my dear wife and family; Samuele, Maddalena, and now, baby Giuliano. In the midst of it all they have been a great source of joy for me. Alexandra is a beautiful picture of serene and quite confidence in the storm. Her calm resolve and trust in the Lord provides for us all a sense of solace and encouragement. Samuele simply *loves* Sicily! If you were to ask him whether he was American (being born there), Canadian (by way of dad), Austrian (by way of mom) or even Italian (by way of dad, *again*) his triumphant reply would be, “*Sono Siciliano...!!! (I am Sicilian).*”



A second human instrument (*so to speak*) the Lord has used as a source of encouragement for me has been our small *church plant* located a few minutes away from the ITA in the city of Acireale, Sicily. We are but a mere handful of families thus far. Nonetheless the Lord is slowly knitting us further together as a group. Our men are in the process of studying *Fundamentals of the Faith*, a manual of sound doctrine by John MacArthur and used at Grace Community Church in Southern California. We come together every second Friday evening to learn the *fundamentals* of the Christian faith and then... *pizza!* I also have the joy of currently teaching on the doctrine of Salvation in our mid-week Wednesday night study. Through this small body of believers the Lord has allowed me to experience wonderful moments of fellowship, discipleship, growth in ministry, and preaching and teaching. *To Him be all the glory.*

By Way of Conclusion

I leave you for now with a verse that has over the years come to characterize us as a family. In 2 Corinthians 5:9 the Apostle Paul writes, “*Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.*” Echoing Paul’s words we also desire with all our hearts to be pleasing to Christ *wherever, whenever and however*. **This is our ambition.**

Johnny and Alexandra Gravino, Samuele, Maddalena & Giuliano

**P.S. Dear Friends, we will be sending our prayer letter via USPS mailings only twice a year.
All other - more frequent - prayer letters will be sent via e-mail.**

If you are interested in keeping current and receiving all our prayer letters and updates please let us know by sending us your e-mail address to: gravinoletter@gmail.com.

Don't forget to keep in touch!