

A Light Shining in the Darkness. The Waldensian History and Vocation



A Power Point Presentation by the American Waldensian Society - Usa

1. [The Waldensian Synod]

A Light Shining in the Darkness

A light shining in the darkness. The long journey of the Waldensian Church.
A presentation of the American Waldensian Society.

2. [The Waldensian symbol]

www.waldensian.org

The symbol of the Waldensian Church is a candle positioned over an open Bible. The historical motto written above the symbol is "*Lux Lucet in Tenebris*" (A Light Shining in the Darkness).

It expresses the idea that the Word of God is the light that illuminates our life. It is an image that well represents the history and life of this community of believers that was founded before the Protestant Reformation.

3. [The Waldensian Synod]

8 Centuries

In this presentation we want to take you on a short voyage through a history that has lasted 8 centuries. 8 centuries of witness to the Gospel, amidst persecution and recognition, hard work and hope. This is the history of the Waldensian Church, a Reformed community of faith, today present in Italy and the Rio De La Plata, in South America.

4. [Entrance into a Waldensian Temple] **A Meaningful Minority**

Today there are 35,000 Waldensians in Italy and 15,000 in South America. Sure, they are a small minority, but a minority that is straining to be meaningful by communicating the Good News of Christ in a spirit of peace, justice, and inclusion.

5 [Waldo]

Since the Middle Ages

The Waldensian Church originated with the preaching of the merchant Valdo (Waldo of Lyons, from whom the church's name originates), 1140 - 1217.

6 [St. Francis]

Saint Francis

He lived during the same period as Saint Francis of Assisi (1181 or 1182 – 1226). Like Francis, Waldo also believed in the value of the evangelical poverty of the early church and, after a profound spiritual crisis, gave all his assets to the poor in order to freely preach the Gospel.

7. [Waldensian presence in the Middle Age] **Waldo**

The movement, known as “The Poor of Lyons” in France and “The Poor Lombards” in Italy, continued to spread throughout Europe. But in a short time it was accused of heresy and thereafter participants were repressed and persecuted by the civil and religious authorities.

8. [The Inquisition]

The Inquisition

Despite very difficult times and the violence of the Inquisition of the Catholic Church, the movement continued to evangelize and succeeded in establishing an important community in the western Alps of the Piedmont, the South of France, Germany, and even in southern Italy (in Calabria).

9. [Chanforan monument] **1532. Joined the Reformation**

The Waldensian movement joined the newly initiated European Reformation in 1532. The first Synod meeting was held in a meadow, in Chanforan, in an area sheltered by the Alps which is still today called the Waldensian Valleys, a little more than an hour from Turin. With the formation of the Synod of Chanforan, the church became a Protestant church in the Presbyterian and Calvinist tradition.

10. [scenes of repression]

The Massacres

But the persecution was not over. Particularly tragic were the massacres of 1655, known as the “Piedmont Easter”, which raised indignant protests in Europe and caused Cromwell’s England to take action. The celebrated poet John Milton wrote of it in his ode, “On the Late Massacre in Piedmont”.

11. [Sibaud monument]

The “Glorious Return”

Persecution began anew in 1685. The few Waldensian survivors in Piedmont remained committed to their faith but had to take shelter in Switzerland. Only four years later, in 1689, they were able to re-enter their valleys. It was for them, the “Glorious Return”: a community of people composed also of women, the elderly and children, which crossed the Alps, driven not only by the tie to their own land, but also by their vocation of freedom to witness to their Protestant faith.

12. **The Waldensian Ghetto**

For the entire 18th Century the Waldensians were confined to their territory in the Waldensian Valleys, more or less as the Jews were to their ghetto, as objects of discriminatory legislation that treated them as second-class citizens.

13. [The edict by King Carlo Alberto] **1848. Civil Liberty**

They had to wait until the **17th of February 1848** for the Edict of Emancipation, issued by Carlo Alberto, to receive political and civil rights (Waldensians in the valleys still celebrate this date yearly with huge bonfires).

14. [A picture with Italian flags] **1948. Religious Freedom**

The Waldensians actively committed themselves to defending the principles of religious freedom and Church-State separation, which they were convinced were important to the political and social renewal of the country. They continued to defend themselves from the Risorgimento (the movement for national unity from 1848 to 1870) through the resistance against Fascism and even into the democratic system granted by the Italian Constitution in 1948.

15. [Italian map with Waldensian sites] **Evangelization in Italy**

In particular, at the end of the Papal State in 1870 and with the unity of Italy, the Waldensian Church was allowed to preach the Gospel in all of Italy. Thereafter, important Waldensian churches and centers were started also in central and southern Italy. Currently the **Waldensian Church** is spread throughout the nation but still today approximately half of the Waldensians are concentrated in the historical valleys of the Piedmont.

16. **Signing Intese (Agreements)**

In 1948, with the approval of the Democratic and Republican Constitution, a new season of freedom began for the Waldensians. However, the full acknowledgement of the Waldensian Church by the Italian state took place only with the approval of the *Intesa* (Agreement) in 1984.

17. **Integration with the Methodists**

Another very important step in the history of the Waldensian Church was the Pact of Integration with the **Methodist Church** in 1979. The Union of Methodist and Waldensian Churches became established, governed by a single synod and administered by the same board.

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18. [Open air worship]

In South America

The Waldensian Church is also present in South America. The first Waldensian colonists from Italy arrived in South America in 1856, during the years of a serious economic crisis that caused millions of Italians to emigrate overseas.

19. [A Church Assembly]

In South America

The Waldensian Colony in Uruguay built their first church and high school in 1888. At the beginning of the XX century, when Italian immigration reached its historical peak, the church also established itself in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

20. [Drums and singers]

In South America

Still today the Italian and the Rio de La Plata Waldensian Churches are a single spiritual family that maintain lively communal relationships and solidarity with one another.

21. [Diaconal service]

Diaconia

In eight centuries of history the medieval Waldensian movement has passed through suffering, blessings, persecution and opportunities for witness. However, its vocation has remained the same: with its numerous **ministries**, the Union of Methodist and Waldensian Churches strives to be a meaningful Christian community, as an active and responsible minority in contemporary society.

22. [A Waldensian School in Sicily] **100 Communities, 100 Social Ministries**

The Waldensian Church today is composed of approximately 100 communities and as many **social programs** distributed throughout Italy, from Sicily to the Piedmont. The social work is active in three areas: *culture* (schools, training institutes, and publishing); *hospitality* (meeting centers, guest houses, and immigrant welcome centers); *service* (elderly, sick, and immigrants).

23. [Children]

Riesi, Sicily

Riesi Christian Service in Sicily, was founded as a social service ministry by Pastor Tullio Vinay in the 1960's and accommodates, among other things, an international resident community.

24.

Palermo, Sicily

La Noce Diaconal Center of Palermo, carries out an important educational and social program in one of the most problematic cities in Italy.

25. [a meeting in Agape]

Agape, Waldensian Valleys

Agape International Center for meetings and training, high in the Piedmont mountains: a must for young people and adults who want to meaningfully experience community life.

26.

Casa Cares, Florence

Casa Cares Meeting Center, in the hills of Tuscany, organizes meetings and seminars but also accommodates groups with their own programs.

27.

Ecumene, Rome

Ecumene Methodist Center, an ideal place for meetings and seminars, situated in the Latium hills, approximately an hour from Rome.

28.

The Waldensian Seminary

For a minority, theological endeavors are very important, because they strengthen identity and support the preaching and witness of ones' own faith. The most important theological institution of the Waldensian Church in Italy is the Waldensian Theological Seminary in Rome. It is a state recognized academic institute that offers university level pastoral training and distance learning courses.

29. [Claudiana books]

Claudiana

An important cultural instrument is the **Claudiana Publishing House**, specializing in the publication of books on Protestant history and theology.

30,

The Waldensian Cultural Center

The **Waldensian Cultural Center Foundation** of Tower Pellice (an hour by car from Turin), is very important for the cultural reflection of the Waldensian Churches and therefore hosts an important library and historical museum. The Foundation also promotes important academic conventions at the local, national, and international level, as well as offering advice for the organization of tours and travel study seminars in the Waldensian Valleys.

31,

Casa Materna, Neaples

Besides the social service centers already cited in Sicily, we want to also highlight **Casa Materna** and **Casa Mia** near Naples, which were both founded by the Methodists as part of their witness in the south of Italy.

32. [an elderly house]

100 Communities, 100 Social Ministries

Homes for the elderly are provided in Vittoria, Sicily; Florence, Tuscany; and the Waldensian Valleys.

33. **100 Communities, 100 Social Ministries**

A recent innovation (over the last few years) has been the hospitality centers for immigrants. Italy has changed from a country of emigration to become a country of immigration. Therefore, there are numerous immigrants, often Protestant, that knock on the doors of the Protestant churches.

34. **A Multi-Cultural Society**

Italy is also a multi-cultural society in which different faiths coexist. Today Islam is the second largest religion with more than one million followers.

35. [The mosque of Rome] **A Multi-Religious Society**

For this reason, interfaith dialogue has increased. The Protestant churches are convinced of its importance: beyond promoting various encounters with leaders of the various communities of faith, the Waldensian Church also actively supports the magazine *Confronti*.

36. [Confronti] **Confronti**

The monthly magazine *Confronti* is composed of Christian of different denominations, Jews, Muslims and believers of other traditions. Among its various programs the magazine also promotes peace education projects. For example, every year in Italy it organizes exchanges between Israeli and Palestinian educators.

37. [Waldensian Synod] **Ecumenism**

Although the Waldensian Church remains a small minority it tries to meaningfully witness to its faith with courage and gratitude. To this end it maintains ecumenical relationships with the various Italian Protestant churches and sister churches overseas: in the USA, in particular, with the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, and the Reformed Church in America.

38. **American Waldensian Society**

The AWS was founded in order to reinforce these relationships and to build new ones. Therefore, at the conclusion of this presentation, we would like to highlight some proposals.

39. **Join Us**

Visit our WEB site, where you will find historical and current information about the Italian Waldensian and Methodist churches.

40

Support a Project

Financially support a project of the Waldensian church (Union of Methodist and Waldensian Churches) in one of the following areas: youth, culture, evangelism, elderly, disabled, or social work. Based on your general interests and budget, the AWS would be able to suggest some projects in which you could participate. Every contribution to the AWS is tax deductible.

41.

Participate in a Travel-Study Seminar

Participate in a travel study seminar to Italy or South America organized by the AWS. For information write: info@waldensian.org

42.

Organize a Travel-Study Seminar to Italy

Organize a travel study seminar to Italy in order to learn about the Waldensians of the Piedmont valleys and, more generally, the Italian Waldensian and Methodist churches.

43.

Visit the Waldensian Valleys

In your travels to Italy, remember to also visit the **Waldensian Valleys**, a little more than an hour by car from Turin.

44. [a sun set]

American Waldensian Society

It would be a good chance to meet a small community of faith that continues to perpetuate a long and rich history. Today it looks to the future, always trusting in the light that, alone, shines in the darkness.

45.

AWS

This presentation was edited by the American Waldensian Society.

46.

Technical realization

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