



NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN WALDENSIAN SOCIETY, INC.

Waldensian Churches in Italy,
Argentina, Uruguay and the US

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A Message from the Executive Director

By Rev. Francis Rivers

By the time this issue of the newsletter goes to press, I will have begun a travel/study seminar to Italy, a seminar undertaken in conjunction with 30 persons (*see photo p. 26*) who either are from or have ties to Valdese, North Carolina. The trip is remarkable for a number of reasons.

For the first time in its history, AWS is collaborating directly with the Waldensian Heritage Museum of Valdese in order to plan, organize, and conduct a travel/study seminar. (Among the participants are the Executive Director of the Museum and several members of the Museum Committee of Waldensian Presbyterian Church.) Given the strong heritage connections and interests of this group, seminar participants will spend the bulk of their time in the Waldensian Valleys. The itinerary foresees visits to landmarks important to Waldensian history, as well as time in specific hamlets from which the ancestors of group members migrated to the United States.



Rev. Francis Rivers

Please see *Director's Message* on page 3

Waldensian Church in Uruguay Celebrates 150th Year

By Dr. John M. Lafferty

Waldensians the world over know the significance of the 1848 Edict of Emancipation that granted them civil rights in Italy. Yet as Christians we know that we live in an imperfect world and that even amid the blessings of today will come challenges for tomorrow. Such it was for the Waldensians over those next 10 years. Although land restrictions for them had been lifted, they had no money with which to buy property, so effectively they remained restricted to their

Please see *Reflections* on page 2

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Reflections on the Celebration

alpine ghetto. Population increases coupled with years of crop failure led to times of near starvation. Young people saw little opportunity for themselves in the Valleys, and emigration became an attractive option for many. Indeed, one young man J.P. Planchon, sought a better life. In 1852, he boarded a vessel that eventually landed him in Montevideo in the new country of Uruguay. He wrote back to the Valleys describing the excellent climate, kindly neighbors, and abundance of cheap land suitable for farming. Within a few years, several hundred Italian Waldensians would make the long and dangerous voyage to South America to begin a new life in the new world. Through civil revolution, internal squabbles, and problems with land ownership and the local Catholic hierarchy, the Waldensian Church of the Río de la Plata survived and prospered.



Now fast forward 150 years: Where do our brothers and sisters in Uruguay and Argentina find themselves? I was honored to represent you, the Presbyterian Church USA (*see the letter of endorsement on page 5*), and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches along with our Executive Director, Francis Rivers, as we made our way to Colonia Valdense, Uruguay, in February to mark this significant milestone in the life of the church. I can tell you that the group of over 100 lay church leaders and pastors, while clearly acknowledging the past, did not dwell there long, but rather plunged into the challenges facing them today. And what are those challenges? I saw three, and one can remember them easily by recalling the letter “M”.

Dr. John M. Lafferty

Money: More is needed not only to run the churches themselves but also to help with the many social ministries the church supports.

Membership: Like mainline Protestant churches in the States, they have been declining in numbers relative to newer and more charismatic groups.

Ministers: There are almost as many retired ministers under church support as active ministers. Happily, the current active ministers are now under the government retirement system, so eventually this problem will be solved.

To these three “Ms” I add a fourth. One that Moderator Sergio Bertinat eloquently described both in Uruguay and later when he came to the States: **Migration**. The South American church was founded in rural areas of Argentina and Uruguay, but now the church needs to have a real presence in urban areas as well. This is where the youth are heading. Thus, for the first time in its history, the Waldensian church will have to establish urban ministries in order to thrive.

Beyond the challenges of the church, I wish to leave you with many other memories: the spirited and very Presbyterian way they discussed, debated, voted and came to consensus on these difficult matters; the first large group dinner around our table of 14 from seven different countries and trying to speak to each other in several languages; the magnificent string quartet from Montevideo that came that first night to play Mozart before three hundred enthusiastic Waldensians that shook the walls of the church with thunderous applause at its end; the Río de la Plata at night, spread out over the horizon farther than the eye could see, set out beneath the dazzling summer sky filled with stars, the Southern Cross staring down on us all as the distant lights of Buenos Aires flickered over the distant shore...

But I leave you with one final image. On that first day, as I was entering the famous church at Colonia Valdense, before my eyes stood a most familiar site in a most unfamiliar place: a young lady in traditional Waldensian dress. In my broken Spanish and her broken English, I managed to ask about her, including her name. “I am Analia Persak Tourn...de Planchon.” “Really”, I pressed forward, “Are you related to the first Waldensian that came to these shores 150 years ago?” “Yes, he was my great, great, great, great uncle.”

Indeed, as Ana stood at the door of that church, she represented a symbol not just for her but for us all: that as Christians and Waldensians we are at once in the past, the present, and the future: She, like us, is one with a magnificent history that continues.



More Photos on Page 27

*Ana Persak Tourn de Planchon
in Traditional Waldensian Dress
at the 150th Celebration*

Director's Message from page 1

These tours will be possible thanks to the growing level of collaboration between AWS, the Waldensian Heritage Museum, and the *Centro Culturale Valdese* of Torre Pellice.

Seminar participants will not focus exclusively on the past, however. Included in the itinerary are opportunities to learn about the current life and ministry of the Waldensian Church. Group members will meet pastors and lay persons of congregations in the Valleys and visit the network of service centers that the Synod's Commission on Diaconal Work coordinates. Group members also will learn how the centuries-old experience of being a religious minority informs the stance that the Waldensian Church has adopted in modern day Italy and why Waldensians are advocates of religious pluralism and promoters of the rights of immigrants from all countries and religious backgrounds

Finally, seminar participants will visit Waldensian congregations in Turin, Bergamo and Milan. These congregations are not located in the Valleys, but they are at the forefront of efforts to discern what it means to be Waldensian in contemporary Italian society. Firmly rooted in their heritage, these congregations also are learning how to be more open and inclusive in their worship and congregational life. As a result, they have been successful in attracting new members, the vast majority of whom are not of Waldensian descent or heritage.

It is at this intersection, I believe, that the American Waldensian Society will find its vocation.

I expect that we will return to North Carolina thankful for a Waldensian heritage that has endured over centuries and across continents. I hope also that we may catch a fresh vision of the relationship between heritage and the times in which we live. It is at this intersection, I believe, that the American Waldensian Society will find its vocation.

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THE REV. DR. CLIFTON KIRKPATRICK, STATED CLERK

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January 23, 2008

Waldensian Evangelical Church of Rio Plata
C/o The Reverend Sergio Bertinat, Moderator

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Those of us in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and indeed Reformed Christians all over the world join you in celebrating 150 years of Waldensian presence in the Rio Plata region. Through the work of the Waldensian Church in Uruguay and Argentina, countless thousands of people have been blessed with the good news of the gospel over the years. We are confident that this ministry of blessing will be even more profound in the years ahead.

We give thanks to God for all of you and for this incredible ministry. The Waldensian Church is a beacon of light for so many of us in the Reformed family of churches. Your deep commitment to the values of the Protestant Reformation, the centrality of the scriptures, and the call to witness to God's peace and justice today are sources of great strength which have enriched not only the people of Uruguay and Argentina but also your brothers and sisters in Christ in the Reformed family all around the world.

I deeply regret that I cannot be with you personally to share in this wonderful celebration, but I am delighted that Elder John Lafferty will be able to represent the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at this most significant event. He comes bringing the best wishes and the strong support of Presbyterians throughout the United States and Reformed Christians throughout the world.

May God's richest blessings be upon your sesquicentennial celebration and upon the important work of your Assembly this year. We give thanks to God for the last 150 years of faithful witness by the Waldensian Evangelical Church of Rio Plata and look forward to even greater things in the years ahead as you move forward in faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

Grace and Peace.

News of Seminaries and Colleges

WFUD Participants Declare Rome Course Beneficial

By Rev. Dr. Craig Atwood



***Participants from Wake Forest Divinity School
Rev. Dr. Craig Atwood, Andrew Heil, Dr. Diane Lipsett,
Kellie Brown and Ward Page***

The two week program in Rome, hosted by the Waldensian Seminary, provided many of the instructors, housing at the Casa Valdese (walking distance of Vatican City) and hospitality. Four US seminaries (Union Theological in NYC, Union-PSCE in VA, Graduate Theological Union in CA, and Wake Forest University Divinity School in NC) sent students and faculty; Waldensian seminary students (Italian, Swiss, German, Romanian, etc) also participated; one student from New Brunswick Theological Seminary in NJ attended on his own, as did Rev. Alfredo Miranda, PC(USA) Hispanic Evangelist in Salem Presbytery.

The program was well-planned and intensive. In fact, it exceeded all our expectations. The seminar had three study tracks in the areas of history and architecture of Christian Rome, ecumenical theology, and the resurgence of God in European politics. Two of our students chose the history track and two chose the resurgence of God track. As part of the history track, Dr. Lipsett lectured on family and gender in early Roman Christianity, following four days of lectures by the eminent NT scholar Francois Bovon of Harvard Divinity School. Dr. Atwood's lecture on the 17th-century ecumenical proposals of John Amos Comenius was attended by students in both the ecumenical and resurgence of God track (as well as members of the faculty from three of the seminaries). Both presentations were well received. There were also lectures by such noted Italian scholars as Drs. Alberto Melloni, Deborah Spina, and Paolo Naso.

The seminar made excellent use of the unique resources of Rome, with tours of major early Christian sites and museums led by the Swiss patristics scholar Martin Wahlfraff and Italian archaeologist Corinna Landi. All participants benefited from the ecumenical emphasis. The full group attended a meeting with Cardinal Kasper, the head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, during which the Cardinal answered questions from students and faculty on Roman Catholic ecumenical efforts. We visited the Jewish ghetto and museum, where students met with the Chief Rabbi of Rome, Riccardo di Segni. Some also visited the mosque in Rome (the largest in Europe) and heard from government officials dealing with Muslim immigration to Italy. Paolo Naso arranged for a meeting with students in the Gregoriana Pontifical University who are studying interfaith dialog. Faculty from the Waldensian seminary provided the distinctive perspective of Italian Protestants, who, from their minority position, have historically been strong advocates for ecumenical and inter-religious dialog.

Planning is underway for a similar program in January 2010.

Reflections on Rome: A Crossroads of Religion

The Waldensian Presbyterian Church celebrated the Edict of Emancipation (February 17, 1848) on Saturday, February 16th. The Wake Forest University Divinity School participants in the Rome course were invited as part of the program to share their experiences. Two students, a rising second year student of WFUDS, Andrew Heil, and Kellie Browne, Candidate for Ordination in the PC(USA) kindly permitted the publication of their presentations.

Kellie Browne

The opportunity to participate in this course in Rome was profound and has impacted my thinking and learning in many ways, some of which I am still discovering several months later. There are no words to adequately capture the experience of learning about early church history from experts in the field, including Professor Bovon of Harvard, while first sitting in a classroom of the only Protestant seminary in the city. Following the lecture, and perhaps lunch, we made a short trip across the city and stood in the very place we just learned about.



One particular moment was in Santa Maria Maggiore, the fourth most important Catholic basilica in the world. Professor Wallroff drew our attention to the mosaic floor, built in the middle ages from tiles made of the ruins of earlier buildings. The feet of countless people before us have worn down those tiles by walking across the floor of that basilica. We could actually put our own feet into those worn down spots and feel what it was like to stand there. Neither a textbook nor a lecture can ever capture such an experience.

The depth of the history of Rome became real to us. As someone who grew up in places where a historical building has a date of perhaps 1700, the experience of standing in the Roman forum among the ruins of buildings that predate Jesus Christ is transformative. Rome continues to uncover its own history through the discovery of buildings and ruins long buried under the present day city. A planned extension of the metro line requires 600,000 archaeological digs!

Another unique experience is to be able to climb down below a present day church to observe the layers of history under it. San Clemente is one example of a basilica built in the middle ages and is still in use today. Visitors can enter that basilica and then go underneath to stand in a 4th century basilica built by Constantine that was later buried to support the present day structure. Climbing down below the fourth century structure, there is a second century temple of Mithra (an ancient mystery religion) and a first or second century house or warehouse thought to be the site of a house-church in Rome. As interesting as it is to read about San Clemente, or even to look at pictures of it, nothing can compare to standing inside the various levels as another student and I did on January 17, my last day in Rome.

Not only did our experience in Rome bring great light to the lessons learned in the classroom of la Facolta Valdese—it expanded my understanding of other history classes I have taken, both at Wake Forest, and as an undergrad history major. My studies in church history and in European history came alive in a new and wonderful way which will remain with me always. I cannot adequately express how thankful I am to have had the opportunity to go to Rome and study at la Facolta Valdese with my fellow students from Wake Forest and from the other participating seminaries in the United States.

Perhaps the most meaningful lesson of this trip was to learn more about the history of the Waldensians and their struggles as the only reformed entity in Italy. The tenacity of this group who endured so much hardship in their history is remarkable. Despite their suffering these brave people—the original “Protestants” of Italy—refused to give up their beliefs and practices. I found myself thinking about how much of my life in North America revolves around Protestant assumptions, while in Italy, Catholic assumptions are the foundation of the culture. The differences between these two foundations and the importance of understanding what lies beneath our culture and our beliefs became very apparent on this trip. Hardly a day passed when the Pope was not on the front page of the Italian paper for what he had done or said, while here at home, the Pope makes

only an occasional mention, and for the most part, he is merely a figurehead. As the head of the Vatican State, his presence in Italian culture and politics is much more prominent. Even while the majority of Italians self-describe themselves as “secular,” the influence of the Pope, and thus of the Catholic Church, continues to be felt deeply in Rome. How interesting to me that la Facolta Valdese continues to operate even as it literally stands in the shadows cast by Vatican City.

My experience in Rome will stay with me always. I am thankful to have been a participant and remain indebted to the American Waldensian Society and the Waldensian Presbyterian Church for their support of this trip. Thank you so much!

Andrew Heil

Having the opportunity to go to Rome was exciting just in itself. The occasion to study ecumenism was, even more invigorating. The concept of ecclesiastical unity continues to fascinate me, for the history of the Christian Church is a history of a divided people and one area that reveals the extent of diversity within the Church is the lack of unity that exists in determining what ecumenism actually is. This diversity of ecumenical perspectives raises questions of eschatology, sacramental theology, Christology, and of course cycles itself back again to the question of ecclesiology and the proper place for the Church in the world today. As I reflect on my time in Rome, therefore I am lured to specific moments of dialogue.



My experiences with La Falcotà Valdese Theological Seminary continue to challenge my understanding of God and consequently of my own responsibility to work for justice and reconciliation through Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. In two weeks, I remained thoughtful, through moments that shaped my current perspective on the role of ecclesiastical unity, and questions that will continue to shape my education and faith.

When discussing the issue of ecclesiastical unity, one is immediately confronted with an extended amount of diversity. The fact is that Christians disagree on every level, including the fundamental question of what it even means to be a Christian. Nonetheless, a common starting point for ecumenical dialogue is doctrinal in nature, specifically the role of the Eucharist (Lord's Supper) in the Church. The World Council of Churches, for example, lists as its primary purpose the desire to become, “a community of churches on the way to visible unity in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship.”

The practice of breaking bread together is a common one among Christians, but many conflicts exist today because Churches have insisted that their sacramental perspective necessitates the exclusion of those missing the same theological lens. Since Rome has been a center of diversity in the western Christian tradition, the question of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is not a new one. However, Fulvio Ferraro, a Reformed Christian and Professor of Systematic Theology at the seminary asks, “Is Spiritual presence any less real than real presence?”

With Ferraro's suggestion in mind the question of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist takes on a different form. Instead of cross-examining the different perspectives, Ferraro validates them both in hopes of creating a dialogue and eventual fellowship between these different churches. In this way, finding a common starting point allows communities of faith to participate with one another in dialogue; that is, there is a need to acknowledge that both communities desire to remain faithful to the Biblical witness and the tradition of the Church in the celebration of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Another question raised during my time in Rome was a question of the need for ecumenical dialogue. When so many churches are divided on so many different issues, why bother to try and bring together communities that do not recognize one another as churches. In other words, is there a need for ecumenism? Paolo Ricca, a retired Waldensian minister and former Dean of the seminary suggests that many churches exist with the mindset, “I can be a Christian without you.” As a result, the Church suffers from a lack of recognition of the fullness of its own identity. The practice of communion in a divided church, therefore, becomes in itself a contradiction of

principles. How can a divided church practice true communion?

Believing that the Church extends beyond local politics and denominational lines, Walter Kasper, the head of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity suggested, “To believe is to be never alone.” The acknowledgment of God in the life of the individual believer is a confession of the existence of something other than the individual. With this in mind I would argue that within the writings of the early Church we already find accounts of the early Christian community desiring to maintain unity. I would suggest, therefore, that it is necessary for Christians to seek to live in unity with other Christians. However, once churches establish that unity is necessary, there is immediate diversity that exists when determining the definition of unity. What does it mean for the Church to be united? For some Christians, as I have already suggested, unity is doctrinal. However, for me, this understanding is narrow and incomplete.

Paolo Ricca suggested, “Ecumenism is not something which you do, it is something that you are.” For Ricca, and I would agree, ecumenism takes place on the deepest level and the question of ecclesiastical unity is a question of essence, not practice.

However, the solution exists at the deepest level because the problem lies there, too. The reason that the Church is fractured is due not to denominations and diverse traditions, but instead to the fundamental problem that takes place within each and every person. Our perspective is limited to our own understanding, and we can never understand the depth to which the human creation is unique. Therefore, John Amos Comenius, a 17th century Czech theologian writes, “Whenever you encounter one of your neighbors, regard him (her) as yourself in another form...or indeed as God in another form, for he (she) is the image of God.”

If we all seek to manifest God’s love in the deepest way possible, unity will reveal itself slowly in the way we live our lives and interact with one another. Questions of ecumenism exist within a humanity that is already divided. The Church is not the only institution whose members cannot live together. The Church is made up of individuals that not only war with one another, but also within themselves. Therefore, the question of unity must begin within individuals and spread throughout the Church.

One evening during dinner, Daniel Garrone, the current Dean of the seminary, said that true dialogue takes place when both sides are open to becoming something new. If this is true, my time in Rome was spent in dialogue, for I have become something new. I was continually impressed by the students and faculty of La Falcotà Valdese, by their desire to promote change in the world, and their willingness to allow God in Jesus Christ to change them. After two weeks in Rome, I can say with great thanks that I have experienced the riches of the Christian expression and, as a result, have graciously benefited from the wisdom and support of the Waldensian Church.

¹ World Council of Churches, “Self-Understanding and Vision,” (Geneva, Switzerland: 2008) <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/who-are-we/self-understanding-vision.html> (accessed on January 29, 2008).

¹Fulvio Ferraro, “Protestant/Roman Catholicism Today: A Reformed Point of View,” in *Rome: Crossroads of Religion*, notes by A. Heil on Jan. 9, 2008.

¹Walter Kasper, *Rome: Crossroads of Religion*, notes taken by Andrew Heil on January 11, 2008. Kasper suggests that dialogue is helpful when communities begin with what they have in common, instead of what divides them.

¹Paolo Ricca, “Vatican II and its Consequences,” in *Rome: Crossroads of Religion*, notes taken by Andrew Heil on January 10, 2008.

¹Walter Kasper, *Rome: Crossroads of Religion*, notes taken by Andrew Heil on January 11, 2008.

¹Because these examples are too numerous, I suggest the following: Acts 15, I Corinthians, and Cyprian of Carthage *On the Unity of the Church*.

¹ Paolo Ricca, “Vatican II and its Consequences,” in *Rome: Crossroads of Religion*, notes taken by Andrew Heil on January 10, 2008.

¹ John Amos Comenius, “A 17th Century Vision of Ecumenism, Peace, and Justice: Comenius’ Plan for the Reform of Church and Society,” presented by Craig Atwood in *Rome: Crossroads of Religion*, notes taken by Andrew Heil on January 11, 2008.

¹Daniel Garrone, January 12, 2008.

News of Seminaries and Colleges ~ Continued

Will Davidson College Join the Collaboration?

By Greg Snyder

On a recent research trip to Italy, I enjoyed a very pleasant visit to the Waldensian Seminary, located not far from St. Peter's and just across the Tiber from the Mausoleum of Augustus. As such, the seminary lies on the axis between two of the most powerful symbols in the city of Rome, both past and present.

Since the Waldensians have a long history of negotiating and surviving the treacherous waters that lie between civil and ecclesiastical power, the location is particularly appropriate. Dr. Daniele Garrone, professor of Hebrew Bible and Dean of the Facoltà, provided a very cordial welcome. The end of the school year is always a busy time for professors and deans and especially so for professors who also happen to be deans! Even so, Dr. Garrone and I enjoyed an extended conversation about the Seminary, about its mission, and about his own background.

Dr. Garrone teaches Hebrew Bible, among other things, and I was intrigued to learn that as a boy, growing up in northern Italy, he attended Hebrew school, where he was able to learn Hebrew at a young age. Most professors of bible would consider themselves extremely fortunate to have begun their study of biblical language at the tender age of six.

Furthermore, having observed the rhythms of Jewish religious life first hand, he possesses a unique ability to participate in vital opportunities for Jewish-Christian dialogue currently taking place in Rome and around Europe.

We visited the Casa Valdese, the hotel owned by the Seminary and enjoyed a fine dinner at La Piccola Irдинia, a local restaurant where the staff was particularly eager to render good service to students, guests of the Seminary, and especially its dean. As a result of my visit and conversation with Dr. Garrone, I have hopes that Davidson College and the Waldensian Seminary can cooperate on future endeavors involving students and faculty. It would be a wonderful opportunity for Davidson to affiliate with an institution rich in history and tradition, and one that shares its Protestant roots and reflexes.



H. Greg Snyder
Associate Professor
of Religion

ANNOUNCEMENT ~ MARK YOUR CALENDARS ~ ANNOUNCEMENT

Symposium on Immigration
Saturday, March 21, 2009
The Old Rock School ~ Valdese, North Carolina

Key Note Speakers:

Attorney Julia A. Thorne, Manager for Immigration Issues & Immigration Counsel, PC(USA)
and

Rev. Maria Bonafede, Moderator of the Tavola Valdese (Waldensian-Methodist Churches of Italy)

News of Seminaries and Colleges ~ Continued

An On-Going Connection Between La Facoltà, Valdese, Wake Forest University Divinity School and Waldensian Presbyterian Church

Professor Daniele Garrone, Dean of the Waldensian Seminary in Rome (La Facoltà Valdese), was for the second consecutive year a Guest Lecturer at the Wake Forest University Divinity School. Professor Garrone taught a two-day, intensive course entitled *Protestant Globalism in the 21st Century*. The course took place February 15-16, 2008. Four students registered for the class.

The logistics of this year's course were novel, a testament to the burgeoning relationship between La Facoltà Valdese, the Divinity School, and Waldensian Presbyterian Church. Professor Garrone and his students met on Friday morning, 15 February, and conducted the first half of the course on the Wake Forest University campus in Winston-Salem, NC. On Saturday morning, 16 February, they traveled to Valdese, NC, for the second part of the class and met in the Waldensian Heritage Museum. This arrangement allowed participants in the course and volunteers at the Museum to meet and interact with one another.

After the course, Professor Garrone and his students remained on hand for the Open House at the Museum that was part of the February 17th Celebration of Waldensian Presbyterian Church. In this way, students in Professor Garrone's course were able not only to meet The Reverend Kevin Frederick, Senior Pastor at Waldensian Presbyterian Church, and members of the Valdese community, but also connect with Dr. Craig Atwood, Dr. Diane Lipsett and the WFU Divinity School students who participated in the January 2008 Course at La Facoltà Valdese. Student presentations about the course in Rome were the centerpiece of the program for the February 17th Celebration.

Professor Garrone has accepted an invitation to teach a January-term course at Union Theological Seminary & Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond, Virginia, in 2009. His colleague at La Facoltà Valdese, Professor Fulvio Ferrario, will take Garrone's place as Guest Lecturer at Wake Forest University. Professor Ferrario will teach an intensive course on recent developments in Systematic Theology.



Professor Garrone and participants in his WFUDS course on a lunch break.

L to R: Matt Johnson, Daniele Garrone, Laura Barclay & spouse Meg Finnerud and Oliver Thomas

News of the Society

Strategic Plan Adopted at Spring Board Meeting

Executive Director, Rev. Francis Rivers, has worked closely with a consultant, Mr. Sam Avery, of Morganton, NC, to organize and shape the ideas that emerged from the September 2007 Strategic Planning Retreat. The result is a document with five overarching priorities.

- *Increase by 20% annually the AWS database of partners who identify with AWS by attending activities, volunteering, donating, or directly engaging the organization.*
- *Support specific capital and program projects of the Waldensian Church in Italy and El Río de La Plata.*
- *Establish a \$2 million Mission Endowment Fund to generate annual funding with which to create and sustain specific ministries and programs of the Waldensian Church in Italy and El Río de La Plata.*
- *Actively promote the Waldensian spirit of solidarity, inclusion and openness to ecumenical, cross-cultural, and inter-religious work.*
- *Increase the organizational capacity of AWS.*

For each of these priorities, the document includes specific action items and a timeline for completion. The AWS Board of Directors meeting last May at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, voted unanimously to approve the Strategic Plan in concept.

A consequence of the strategic planning process has been the realization that the Society and the Waldensian Church in Italy and El Río de La Plata face similar challenges. On the one hand, consistent and systematic efforts are needed to inform and mobilize existing constituents. As Reverend Sergio Bertinat, Moderator of La Mesa Valdese, noted during his trip to Italy in April 2008, one of the most pressing tasks facing the church in El Río de La Plata is reaching out to and re-energizing “los miembros sin compromiso” (members who are inactive). Pastors and lay persons in the Waldensian Valleys of Italy welcomed the Moderator’s comments and acknowledged their struggle with precisely the same issue.

On the other hand, creative and well designed initiatives are crucial in making the general public aware of Waldensian ministry and recruiting new partners and collaborators.

In this regard, the Otto per mille campaign of La Tavola Valdese has had remarkable success. The number of Italian citizens who choose to designate 0.008 of their yearly tax payment to the Waldensian Church has grown consistently over the past decade and now includes over 250,000 persons—almost ten times the current membership of the Waldensian Church in Italy.

In order to generate the support and enthusiasm necessary to implement its Strategic Plan, the Society must embrace similar challenges. It must educate existing supporters about the work of AWS and reach out to potential new partners. How best to face into these tasks will be the principal topic of conversation during the Fall Board Meeting, scheduled to take place in October 2008 at The House of the Redeemer in New York City.

What is the Otto per Mille?

In 1993, the Waldensian/Methodist Synod, after a protracted debate, voted to accede to a new law that allowed denominations to receive 8 Lire of every 1,000 Lire of Income Tax due the Italian government. The only requirement was that individual tax payers had to indicate such a preference on their tax forms. In making this decision, the Synod established two guiding principles.

The funds received would not be used for ecclesiastical purposes; that is, Otto per mille funds could not be used for pastoral salaries or for any activities directly related to worship services or maintenance of church property, but only for social programs or cultural projects that served the public good. The Synod also agreed that a portion of Otto per mille funds would be set aside for Third World projects conducted in cooperation with partner religious or lay organizations.

Second, the Synod established that only contributions coming from tax payers who explicitly declared their preference for the Waldensian Church would be accepted. In effect, the Waldensian Church opted to forego funding derived from the subdivision of contributions by tax payers who had not declared a specific preference.

"Otto per Mille to the Waldensians: 100% to Projects of Solidarity"

www.ottopermillevaldese.org

Invitation

*Saturday, October 11, 2008 at Six O'Clock in the Evening
House of the Redeemer
Seven East 95th Street ~ New York, NY 10128*

You are cordially invited to a dinner to bring together the New York area members and friends of the American Waldensian Society in order to re-connect with and enhance commitment to the Society.

Please R.S.V.P. to Sheila Young toll free at 866-825-3373 or info@waldensian.org

Focus on the United States

Waldensian Weekend in Virginia Beach

By Ricardo and Marina Cobanera

The Cobaneras are members of the Reformed Church of Buenos Aires (IERBA) and live in the Argentine capital. Together with their daughter Maria, they have spent the past year in Leesburg, Virginia.

Thanks to Francis Rivers of the American Waldensian Society and Don Bradway of Kings Grant Presbyterian Church, who made the contacts, we were invited to share a “Waldensian Weekend” at King’s Grant Presbyterian Church on 19-20 April 2008. It was our first visit to Virginia Beach since we arrived in Virginia from Argentina last August, and we enjoyed it very much.

We arrived on Saturday afternoon to the hotel where everything had been perfectly arranged for us. That evening we were guests at the home of David and Georgia Jones, who prepared a wonderful dinner for us and the members of the congregation who had visited the Waldensian Valleys last fall. Over dinner, we were able to share personal stories and hear more about the trip.

On Sunday morning we attended the contemporary worship. This was a new experience for us, since services in our congregation in Buenos Aires are very traditional. Afterwards, during Sunday school, we listened to Francis tell the adult class about the history of the Waldensian Church in Europe and America. John and Laura Lafferty, wearing traditional Waldensian clothes, told us about the history of the Waldensians in the US and their settlement in North Carolina. Finally, we explained in our presentation some aspects of the history the Waldensians in South America, how they arrived to Uruguay and Argentina, and some contemporary issues of the Waldensian Church of the Río de La Plata. We ended our visit with a lunch that we all shared with Pastor Sel Harris and his wife, Liz.



From R-L: Marina Cobanera, Dr. John Lafferty, his wife Laura, Don Bradway, Fiammetta Rivers, Sel and Liz Harris, Francis Rivers Ricardo Cobanera

The weekend in Virginia Beach was for us a unique experience to think about the similarities and differences that Waldensians have developed over a century of living in North and South America. We are grateful to the members of Kings Grant Presbyterian church for this opportunity.

Focus on the United States

Waldensian Presbyterian Calls New Pastor

Valdese, NC - The Waldensian Presbyterian Church after more than two years with a vacancy called Rev. Dr. Kevin E. Frederick as pastor, September 12, 2007.

Rev. Frederick has served the past 21 years as an Associate Pastor for three large congregations: First Presbyterian of Oxford, MS; New Providence Presbyterian in Maryville, TN and Black Mountain Presbyterian in Black Mtn, NC. This is Kevin's first call as Pastor/Head of Staff. He is a graduate of Warren Wilson College, NC, obtained a Master of Arts in Christian Education from Presbyterian School of Christian Education, VA and earned Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry from Louisville Presbyterian Theological, KY. He is married to Mary Jane and has two children, Eleanor and Sam.



Rev. Dr. Kevin E. Frederick

Board members of the Society and the church enjoyed his first sermon so much, they requested that excerpts be reprinted in the newsletter.

All Together Now! ~ Ephesians 4: 7-17

Rev. Dr. Kevin E. Frederick

... Well here I am! For me it was a three year search for the right match. And along the way I felt more than once that I was more than ready and that some of those churches that I was looking at would have been a good match. And I have to admit to getting frustrated with the process and God's sense of timing and only in looking back was I able to see the further preparation that I needed to undergo, including more work on patience and trust in God. Plus, there were a number of tasks that I needed to do with and for the Black Mountain congregation before they would be prepared both for their centennial next year and for the transition time without two pastors. I know you have gone through a long period of waiting and expectancy as well. For this congregation, the struggles resulting in conflict within the community followed by a sizable group that left here to form a new church, created a time of deep soul-searching for this community of faith. But God was faithful to you. And you were bold enough to recognize your need for help reaching out to the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center. You committed your time and finances to re-building your faith, souls and relationships with each other and with Christ. I found that fact alone extremely attractive about you.

When I interviewed with the Pastor Nominating Committee I asked the question, "What have you as a church learned from the time spent with the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center?" It was Tammy Black who said, "We learned that we must do a better job listening to each other, respecting each other's opinions and trying to find out what motivates the positions we take on issues." She thought for a moment and added, "We also learned how much we love this church and want to see it grow again and become faithful in its ministry." Heads around the table were nodding in agreement from other members of the PNC. It was right then that I decided that I wanted to know more about you and realized that if this group extended a call to me, that I would most certainly give it my most serious consideration. You see, I heard in that answer a sense of openness and a level of humility in this congregation that I think is essential to ministry. How does a congregation's relationship with a pastor really allow for the whole congregation to become the living body of Christ if there is not a commonly understood sense of Christ-centered humility from which both the congregation and the pastor learn to operate? Yesterday, I read the 21 page summary report from the LMPC and I gleaned at an even deeper level the extensive efforts you are making to grow together in unity. And I vow my utmost attention to follow through with all of the recommendations of the report. Humility is an absolutely essential principle for a healthy congregation. And let me assure you that it is a standard that I try to live by everyday as a pastor.

All Together Now Sermon - Continued

Over the years, I have worked with a number of pastors who were heads-of-staff or were interims of congregations I served. There were a lot of different styles of leadership, each with a set of gifts and skills but also a set of drawbacks that I sought to learn from. And it always struck me as counterproductive when I observed an air of arrogance in the orientation in a pastor/head of staff to the congregation and to the rest of the staff; almost as if to say, you folks are all here to do my bidding. This basic orientation is the quickest way towards creating a dysfunctional relationship between a congregation and its leadership. And it can operate both ways, especially between pastor and the Session. But that is not what I am about as a pastor and a disciple of Jesus. I want to know our concerns and criticisms not from third parties, but from you. Speaking the truth in love is the only way to build a strong community of faith. For in Jesus we see over and over the model of one who leads by humility and love. It struck me as I was reading about the history of the early Waldensians and their beliefs that they held to this same orientation. The head of the church is Jesus Christ, not the pope or any human being, they said. It was the basic biblical premise that caused them to be at odds with the Roman Catholic church and its leadership for centuries. First, the Waldensians and much later the Presbyterians and other reformers realized that the pastor is not the head of the church and it is only when the elected elders with the pastor come together as the Session to seek to know the mind of Christ. It is the session including the pastor that is seeking the guidance of Christ which serves as the living head of the Presbyterian church. That is the key understanding at the core of our identity as Presbyterians, we listen together to discern what our actions and vision should be. In short, a pastor manipulating a session to fall in line with his or her will in neither true Presbyterian nor true Waldensian. When the mind of Christ is sought there is room available for all members of a community of faith to find their own vital roles within it. And that is true not just of the session but also of every voice in the congregation.

As I have already indicated to you I am a strong student of history and have always been a student of American history. For several weeks now I have been reading about the Waldensians from Peter Waldo in 1173 in Lyon, France, down to the Centennial of this congregation in 1993. In an age when the Roman church was the power and authority, Peter Waldo sided with the poor and ministered through proclaiming good news of the Gospel, living beside the poor and encouraging their personal dignity as Children of God by sharing with them knowledge of the Bible. Education was a high priority of Waldensians from the very beginning but at no time more important when during the mid-19th century, when an Englishman named Charles Beckwith, himself not a Waldensian but with a deep love and respect for the Waldensians helped to organize their love of learning and built a number of schools throughout the Waldensian Valleys so that everyone could read and study the Scriptures on their own and grow in mind, body and spirit. I also learned that for several centuries that Waldensians were particularly supportive of mission outreach to orphanages and schools because of the plight of many Waldensian children who hundreds of years ago in Europe were stolen from their families and raised Roman Catholic.

I share this part of the history of the Waldensian movement not so much to demonstrate that I am becoming knowledgeable about your identity as a congregation but because I truly believe the best way we can be true to our calling as the Body of Christ is by learning who we have been and how our ancestors in the faith have lived as disciples of Jesus Christ because we must listen to the past in order to know how we are called to be as a people in the present and the future. How do we honor our heritage? By codifying and memorializing our past? Or by living by those same principles today as a unified witness to Jesus Christ? I use the term WE to include myself even though I am brand-spanking new in this congregation without a drop of Waldensian blood in my veins. But to be a Waldensian can and should be interpreted in at least two different ways.

First, there are those who are living descendants from the original Waldensians who traveled here from the Cottian Alps of Italy 114 years ago. There is a connection of family and blood that is strong and obviously cannot be shared by the rest of us, but that is not the whole of who WE are.

Then, there are the Waldensians who have learned about the witness of faith of a people who faced an extreme amount of persecution for hundreds of years because they remained faithful to Jesus Christ and understood a great distinction between loyalty to Christ and loyalty to a flawed human institution called the Roman Catholic church.

Focus on the United States ~ Continued

There are those of us who recognize the calling to live first as disciples of Jesus Christ, sharing the good news, teaching our children and others about the faith, ministering beside the poor, raising concern for the marginalized of our society, honoring the dignity of other immigrants and outsiders because that is the very type of person that Jesus sought out over and over again to restore not only with God but with the larger community as well. And those who seek to build up the fellowship between members of the body of Christ are all in a sense of the word, Waldensians and Presbyterians. I will tell you that, as I read the theology at work behind the history of the Waldensians I had a clear sense on many occasions that I have been a Waldensian in spirit without knowing it all my life.

In that sense of the word, all who seek to know the Word of the Lord, and who seek to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, who are other-directed in a humble way and want to grow into the full maturity of the Body of Christ and the Unity that the Apostle Paul writes about to the Ephesians; we are in spirit and in truth Presbyterian Waldensian. I came to this understanding before talking with our own Carolyn Williams who serves on the board of the American Waldensian Society. She told me that the current emphasis of the AWS is on moving from the perception of Waldensianism as an identity of blood to that of Waldensianism as an identity of belief and servant hood in Jesus Christ. And as a Presbyterian, I believe I can be a better Presbyterian by learning how to be a good Waldensian. When it comes right down to it the Apostle Paul's theme throughout Ephesians says faith lived out together is a greater bond than blood ties.

It isn't by chance that Presbyterians and Waldensians aligned with each other in 1895, nor is it by chance that I have been called here to serve beside you as your pastor. We have a purpose and a call to fulfill, and I cannot do it without you and you cannot do it without me. Together, let us grow as the Apostle Paul says, "to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ."

2008 Founders Day Festival

By Emile M. Jacumin, Jr.

The Town of Valdese, founded 115 years ago by Waldensians from Italy, celebrated its Founders Day from May 30 til June 1, 2008 at the Waldensian Trail of Faith.

The Trail of Faith, the Town of Valdese, the Tourism Department and representatives of the Waldensian Heritage Museum assisted with the activities. Approximately 40 volunteers helped carry out Trail tours, operate old farm equipment and monitor over 40 exhibits. 2300 middle school kids from the local county and neighboring school systems were treated on Friday to a Civil War reenactment by the 26th NC Infantry School of Soldiers. They enjoyed the entire festival following.

Over 4000 people visited during the three days. Seventeen exhibits represented replicas of the original school, a seminary, church, first homes, and the original sawmill. Two monuments representing Chanforon and Sibaud were also on display.

The Town of Valdese, NC was founded May 29, 1893 by 29 settlers from eleven Italian families. On November 23rd 100 more left the valleys to join the original settlers.



Gus and Frances Tron in original Waldensian dress

Focus on the United States

Moderator Sergio Bertinat Visits US

Moderator Sergio Bertinat from the Waldensian Church, Río de la Plata, accompanied by Rev. Dario Barolín who helped with translation, arrived in the US in late April. They had a demanding itinerary for the next two weeks.



Moderator Sergio Bertinat shares the struggles of the Waldensian Church in Uruguay over dinner in Valdese

They arrived in Valdese, NC and retired to the Pascal hospitality house for a brief rest. That afternoon, they toured the Trail of Faith and Waldensian Heritage Museum. In the evening, Carolyn Pascal-Williams hosted the General Presbyter of the Presbytery of Western NC, Rev. Bobbi White, in an exchange between Moderator Bertinat, Rev. Barolín and local members of the AWS board over dinner.

Sunday morning, our guests attended worship at Waldensian Presbyterian and met the new pastor, Rev. Kevin Frederick. A picnic on the church lawn followed the 11 a.m. service, then on to the Waldensian Heritage Winery for an afternoon of conversation regarding the upcoming board meeting in NYC.

Monday morning, following a consultation with Sam Avery, Strategic Planning Consultant for the Society, our guests moved to the home of Francis Rivers in Winston-Salem. Over the course of the following days, Bertinat and Barolín met with Rev. Alfredo Miranda and Rev. Lemuel Garcia, staff members of Salem Presbytery, led a Bible Study at the Misión Hispana “El Buen Pastor,” attended a meeting of the presbytery’s Hispanic Ministry Task Group, and met with Rev. Dr. Bill Leonard, Dean of the Wake Forest University Divinity School.

On Saturday, 3 May, Bertinat and Barolín flew with Rivers to New York City and had the opportunity prior to the AWS Board Meeting to spend time with Board President Rev. Dr. Gabriella Lettini, and Board member Rev. Dr. Brian Paulson. During the board meeting itself, Bertinat and Barolín had to navigate a tight schedule. After a presentation to the Board about the life and ministry of the Waldensian Church in El Río de La Plata, Bertinat and Barolín met with the Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon, ordained minister in the Christian Church/Disciples of Christ and General Secretary of the National Council of Churches. As backdrop to this meeting, Bertinat explained that the Waldensian Church had received an invitation from Disciples of Christ congregations in Argentina to collaborate in joint mission work. Given the close relationship in the United States between the Christian Church/Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ, Bertinat and Barolín also met with the Reverend Michael Caine, Association Minister for the Metro-Suffolk Associations of the United Church of Christ.

Moderator Bertinat Visits US ~ Continued

More details are reported at right. 

At the conclusion of the Board meeting, Bertinat and Barolín traveled to Chicago with Rev. Brian Paulson. Dr. Paulson introduced them to the Mission Committee of First Presbyterian Church, Libertyville, IL where they spoke about new ministries underway in Buenos Aires.

Later they visited with the Rev. Robert Reynolds, Executive Presbyter of the Chicago Presbytery to speak about possible collaborations in Latino ministries.

Paulson also accompanied Bertinat and Barolín to meetings with Global Mission staff at the national offices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and with faculty members at McCormick Theological Seminary.

On Wednesday, 7 May, Francis Rivers met Bertinat and Barolín in Libertyville and drove with them to Grand Rapids, MI, for meetings with the Reverend Bruce Menning, Director of Global Mission, the Reformed Church in America, and other members of the national staff of the RCA.

You can support the **American Waldensian Society** by mailing a check in the enclosed envelope or sending a gift to the fund below:

Waldensian Fund of the Presbyterian Foundation:
For the work of the American Waldensian Society
Account #1020052583 ~ Fund ID #94324

To make an addition to this fund, include fund name and account # on your check and mail to:

*Presbyterian Foundation
PO Box 406863
Atlanta, GA 30384-6863*

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200 East Twelfth Street
Jeffersonville, IN 47130

Report of Meeting with UCC

By Rev. Cliff Frasier

Navigating tight schedules during the AWS board meeting, Rev. Dario Barolin and Rev. Sergio Bertinat, met with the Rev. Michael Caine, the Association Minister for the Metro-Suffolk Associations of the United Church of Christ. In search of closer ties with the UCC, the Waldensian leaders reported that Waldensian churches have been invited into joint mission work with Argentine congregations of the Disciples of Christ. Given the close relationship in the United States between the Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ, it made sense to explore how relations with both traditions could develop in tandem.

It was a productive meeting. Rev. Caine reflected warmly on a trip he had taken visiting Waldensian ministries in Italy, and he gladly engaged the topic of exploring these kinds of connections with S American Waldensians. Foremost, Caine identified an ecclesiological “fit” between the UCC and Waldensian traditions, drawing from similar theological streams in the Reformed tradition. Also, the sentiment in this conversation was that connections could be promoted more quickly on the local and regional levels, allowing such to filter up to the denomination’s national offices.

Other topics discussed included: mission trips; the Lancaster Seminary (UCC) requirement that seminarians work and study for several months abroad; the new Waldensian priority on urban ministry in South American cities; and a delegation of UCC leaders visiting Waldensian churches in order to become better acquainted with the South American context.

Reverends Caine, Barolin and Bertinat agreed to remain in touch with each other in the months ahead, as we revisit these discussions in more concrete form.

Focus on South America

Learning from Each Other's Strengths

By Ann Saigeon

The following is an article published in *RCA Today*~

In September 2007, representatives from the Waldensian Church in El Río de la Plata paid a visit to RCA churches in New York City. They were impressed with what they learned about the ministry of lay people in those churches. They began to see ways they could adapt what they had learned for their own church's ministry. Accordingly, La Mesa Valdense and the American Waldensian Society organized a follow up visit with RCA leaders for Spring, 2008.

Sergio Bertinat and Dario Barolín are pastors in the Waldensian Church in El Río de la Plata; Bertinat is also the denomination's moderator. We were impressed with what we saw when we visited Fordham Manor Reformed Church in Bronx, New York," says Bertinat. "Everyone there is involved in the work of the church." "We were surprised at the protagonist role of the lay person in the life of the church, starting with the roles of deacons and elders, and also with the realization that all members have the opportunity and responsibility to take part in the life of the church.

"In our case, little by little, we've been losing this [participation by the laity]. We are glad that some of our sister churches are revitalizing the role of the lay person."



Bruce Menning, Francis Rivers, Sergio Bertinat, Dario Barolín at Michigan Regional Center in Grand Rapids

"The RCA's relationship with the Waldensians, which previously was carried on by RCA mission supervisors Jhonny Alicea-Baez and Duncan Hanson, has now broadened," says director of RCA Global Mission Bruce Menning. Menning hosted Bertinat and Barolin for two days at the RCA's Michigan Regional Center. "We've learned so much about each other and the ways God has brought us together."

Menning adds that the Waldensian Church in South America is well known for its social service work, and that the RCA can learn from its example. However, Bertinat notes, the Waldensian Church needs to tie its social work more explicitly to the gospel. "We do good work regarding service to the community," says Bertinat, "but it has become disassociated from the testimony of Jesus Christ. We consider social service a very important aspect of Christian testimony, but we fail in the sense that we can't get to the point where people feel they are being connected to the church."

Learning from Each Other's Strengths ~ Continued

Bertinat shared a bit of history about Waldensian ministry in South America. “It is a church that has 150 years of testimony in Uruguay and Argentina,” he says. “For those 150 years, the word of God has fulfilled a fundamental role in the life and testimony of the church.” “We’ve fulfilled another role as well: the building that was the place of worship on Sunday was used during the week as a school for children. Before the Waldensian Church, there was no school at all for these children.”

Bertinat and Barolin believe the Waldensian Church has much to share with the RCA. For example, Bertinat notes, members of the Waldensian Church have a great deal of respect for creation.

“It’s important to understand that up to this point, the church has been involved primarily in rural areas. The result has been a strong connection with life, land, and the earth.” “Our emphasis on social witness is also something we can share with the RCA,” Barolin adds, noting that the Waldensians are strong advocates for social justice. “Because the church has experienced a long history of persecution, we are very respectful of other peoples’ ideas,” says Bertinat.

The Waldensian Church’s history of harsh persecution for their beliefs goes back centuries and took place in Europe. While its members aligned themselves with the reformers of the 1500s, the Waldensian Church actually predates the Reformation. It has its roots in the twelfth century, with a group of believers in Italy who taught that lay people should read the Scriptures in their everyday language and serve as ministers.

In 1856, economic conditions in Italy’s Waldensian Valleys led several Waldensian families to emigrate to Uruguay. They established a settlement in 1858, and more families from Italy soon began arriving. In 1965 the church, which by now had expanded into Argentina, held its own synod for the first time. Today the Waldensian Church in El Río de la Plata, a region that includes parts of Uruguay and Argentina, is the South American branch of the Waldensian Church.

It’s a church that has faced great hardship, that has held onto its testimony, and that wants to become even more effective in sharing that testimony. When the pastors from Uruguay visited the Michigan Regional Center in May 2008, they met with staff who gave them an overview of Our Call, the RCA’s 10-year goal, which emphasizes planting new churches and revitalizing congregations.

“We seek ways to revitalize and grow,” says Bertinat. “One of the challenges we are facing is that people are moving from rural areas to cities, making it challenging for us to reach people in big cities. It’s important to empower the laity—for example, to use college students to help develop ministry in the cities when they move there in order to attend university. “Routes of cooperation with the RCA will be important, especially with regard to things that have to do with the mission of the church. A plan for equipping and training people, for realizing our capacity, will be very important.”

Focus on South America

The Ecumenical Center of the Barrio Borro in Montevideo, Uruguay

The Ecumenical Center of the Barrio Borro (Borro neighborhood) opened its doors in 1978. Working from the intersection of Orsini Bertani and Martirené, in the heart of the Borro, the religious community began the project by offering shared meals and snacks to residents of the neighborhood.

In the following years, the community began to develop different programs for children, youth and women. The goal of these programs was to offer hope and to fulfill the needs of the local residents, many of whom lived in situations of marginalization. The community affirmed is Christian identity in the development of these programs, getting together with local and regional congregations to share moments of celebration (Easter, Pentecost, Labor Day, Children's Day, Reform Day, Christmas).

The Board is made up of representatives from the following Churches:

- The Waldensian Church of El Río de La Plata
- The German Protestant Congregation of Montevideo
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church
- The Methodist Church of Uruguay



Milton Costa, Director of the Center, standing beneath a mural on the exterior wall of the Center

Kevin Baker and Kristen Dumke are part of the Young Adults in Global Mission Program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. For the past year, they have served at the Ecumenical Center of the Barrio Borro and collaborated with both the Lutheran and Waldensian congregations in Montevideo. This fall, Kevin will begin the Master of Divinity Program at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, and Kristen will begin her theological studies at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, CA.

First Impression About My Experience

By Kevin Baker

There are things in life that you can never imagine, no matter how hard you try, until they actually happen. I think immediately to certain aspects of my work at La Obra Ecumenica Barrio Borro in Montevideo. I have, at various moments in time, found myself: teaching little kids The Name Game Song (“Sergio Sergio bo-bergio, banana nana fo-fergio, me-mi-mo-mergio, Sergio”) in an effort to learn new names as well as teach some basic music theory; tutoring high school chemistry in Spanish; putting slices of mozzarella on pizza fresh out of the oven at lunchtime, all the while making jokes with the cook; getting roped into dancing salsa and cumbia with multiple women old enough to be my mother.

The funny moments, though, are not the eye-opening ones. The kids who looked at me like a crazy person for singing a silly name song come from single-mother households, low-income families, or living situations marked by violence. The students in Centro de Estudios face an uphill battle every

day as they try to balance complicated home situations and economic pressure with the stresses of secondary school. The participants of Casa Jóven who wolfed down the pizza might have had their only meal of the day at La Obra, and the women who dragged me onto the dance floor have survived more economic struggles and domestic violence than I can imagine.

Life is two-sided; it is funny, and it is heartbreaking. At La Obra, both sides are seen, but with a twist. Instead of wallowing in sad moments and broken realities, the objective is to fix them - to empower, to edify, to help people hope, and work, for a new reality.

Reflection by Volunteer

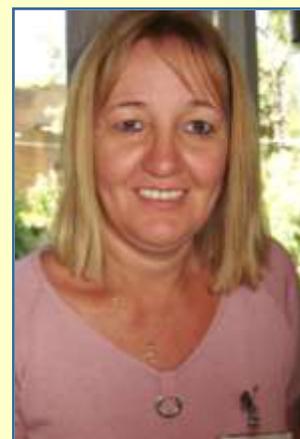
By Kirsten Dumke

When moving to a new city, the first thing one often searches for is some sort of connection, someone that has a common interest to whom they can relate. Seven months ago, upon my arrival in Montevideo, Uruguay, the search for such a connection in my new culture and second language was constant. As a volunteer with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, there were people and groups that I was set up with prior to my year here; however, I never imagined that I would find myself spending time within a church that I had never heard of.

As a born and raised Lutheran, the Waldense Church and its history fascinate me. The story of Waldo's reformation, which occurred three centuries before Martin Luther's time, is something that the people are knowledgeable of within the church; it is evident that the ancestral pride still carries through last names and family ties. I have been witness to this through various activities: singing in the Waldense Church choir, attending their synod assembly, church services and, most importantly, being welcomed in to their Young Adults group, which is comprised of college-aged students from Montevideo and the interior parts of the country. These experiences have been more than a connection for me; rather, I have become a part of their family. A family whose name, just seven months ago, I have never heard.

Amongst the excitement of building a community of friends and family, I have spent 25 hours a week working at La Obra Ecumenica with their Club de Niños program. Within this program I have been able to dedicate time each week to teaching English to both levels of students, which, with undergraduate majors in K-12 Education and Spanish, has been a wonderful space for me to utilize my gifts. Although I have taken on the role of a teacher, my relationships with the kids at La Obra have certainly taught me more than I will be able to teach them in a years time. On a daily basis these children have been reminders of God's love and kindness, through which they touch my heart more than they will ever know. It has been a blessing to integrate into this thriving community, in which I have been welcomed, embraced as part of their team and worked in accompaniment through our experiences together this year.

This year of volunteer work has brought many surprises, but what has touched my heart the most have been the relationships. The people that I have been blessed to meet in Montevideo through the Lutheran and Waldense congregations and through La Obra will walk with me wherever my path leads and, through these connections, I look forward to learning more about my new family.



**Rev. Wilma Rommel,
Co-Pastor of the
Lutheran Church in
Montevideo hosting
these volunteers**

Focus on Italy

The Responsibilities of a Minority

Below is the response of Reverend Maria Bonafede, Moderator of the Tavola Valdese, to the announcement that Italian authorities plan to fingerprint around 80,000 Rom-Gypsy children. The measure has drawn comparisons to the policies of Benito Mussolini.



Photo by Pietro Romeo

Maria Bonafede, Moderator of Tavola Valdese

There are moments during which responsibility for vigorously reaffirming fundamental principles of civil society falls on the shoulders of small minorities. It is the duty of these minorities to intervene because they know first hand the pain of prejudice and persecution inflicted by the majority, a majority all too often ill informed, distracted, confused, or manipulated and therefore unable to stop episodes of hatred, discrimination and violence against whomever's turn it is to be different. Today it is the turn of the Gypsy children.

We are not naïve. We know that behind every Gypsy child who begs for alms or steals a wallet there is an intolerable chain of violence that must be broken. However, recent measures announced by the Italian government will require Italian authorities to fingerprint Gypsy children; all the children, not just those who have committed a crime or lack appropriate immigration documents. This procedure smacks of ethnic profiling and will reinforce the prejudicial stereotype that Gypsies naturally are inclined to lives of crime. The measures also cast the Italian government as the heroic defender of public order, compelled to pursue preventative actions that will neutralize a perceived danger. Yet no Gypsy child will be spared the indignity of begging for alms because he or she is fingerprinted. And what will happen after enforcement of the measures? More than half of the Gypsy residents in Italy are Italian citizens. Does the government plan to enact "special laws" for them? The very idea revives chilling memories from Italian and European history. And after the Gypsy children, will the government identify other "threats" and devise measures that target them?

At a time when an array of municipal administrations on both the left and the right compete with each other to see who can demolish the largest number of Gypsy camps, we should recall those rare and worthy attempts at integration that rather than allow children to live on the streets in marginal neighborhoods, brought an increasing number of Gypsy children into the school system.

The European Union promptly expressed alarm over the intention of the Italian government to pursue the fingerprinting policy. The concern was justified. Since the measures were announced, they have consolidated a wall of prejudice and provided cover for fanatics who, armed with clubs and Molotov cocktails, have sought to take the law into their own hands.

It is precisely during such moments that minorities, having experienced discrimination and violence, must sound the alarm. Minorities must say to the majority, "Stop!" We are implementing disproportionate measures against petty criminals and overreacting to the demands of Italians for public safety. We are taking steps that are not only brutal in form and substance, but also difficult to reconcile with the Italian Constitution and European law. We are sowing evil seeds that could produce poisonous fruit.

As Waldensian and Methodists, we acknowledge ourselves a minority that on the topic of civil rights has an important word to say. We speak, therefore, with all the strength and conviction at our disposal. We cannot keep silent during this moment when our spiritual, ethical, and civil responsibility demand that we speak out.

For additional information, see: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/italy/2200020/Italy-to-fingerprint-all-Roma-gipsy-children.html>

Pastor Claudio Pasquet Visits Upstate NY

By Brad Lewis

June 15-19, those of us in the Regional Synod of Albany of the Reformed Church in America had the pleasure of hosting the Rev. Claudio Pasquet, Senior Pastor of the Waldensian congregation in Torre Pellice. My wife Cathy and I looked forward to the visit, having met Rev. Pasquet in Torre Pellice last August, as representative the RCA, as its past President, at the Waldensian Synod. The opening worship of the Synod was held in Rev. Pasquet's church.

For me and others, Rev. Pasquet's visit was rich in opportunities to share ministries, to learn from one another, and to continue to find common ground between churches in the US and Waldensians in Italy as the relationship between the RCA and the Waldensian church deepens. His days in upstate New York offered Rev. Pasquet opportunities for dialogue with churches and people here about ministry and mission (especially mission!) and chances to observe American sights and culture.

One stop was at First Reformed in Schenectady, my home church, which is aiding an innovative program by funding two "missioners" who are working not mainly for members of our church but with a community coalition in Schenectady. Groups ranging from business organizations to Proctor's Theater to our congregation to the City Mission, which has a major role in directing the program, want to find a "third way" of having our city make all citizens feel welcome downtown. Rev. Pasquet had a chance to meet with missioners Art Hudak and Dan Butterworth and the Rev. Stacey Midge, who splits her time at First Reformed between youth work and outreach to groups and individuals we often don't see in our congregations. Rev. Pasquet also visited the staff at Bethesda House, an interfaith effort which started as a drop-in center, and now has a variety of programs to aid the poor and is building a secure, permanent housing facility for Schenectady's chronically homeless.



*Rev. Claudio Pasquet Meeting with the Missioners and Minister at First Reformed Church, Schenectady, NY
L to R: Dan Butterworth, Rev. Stacey Midge, Art Hudak and Claudio Pasquet*



Claudio and Kent Busman, Director of the Fowler Camp and Conference Center, Speculator, NY, at a prayer cabin under construction at the camp

At Albany Synod's Fowler Camp and Conference Center, an hour and a half north of Schenectady in the Adirondacks, Rev. Pasquet and I had a tour, lunch, and conversation with Fowler Director Kent Busman and his staff of counselors. Fowler is on the cutting edge of our denomination with a building campaign that includes a major "green" emphasis; strong summer camp programs and hosting of group retreats and events; outreach day camps in upstate New York cities for groups of kids, mostly not in Reformed churches, who cannot come to Camp Fowler; and a strong emphasis on spiritual formation and the development of future Christian leaders.

Toward the end of his visit, Rev. Pasquet also met with Kent McHeard, pastor at Woestina Reformed Church near Schenectady, who is finishing his Master of Divinity work at New Brunswick Theological Seminary and who attended the interdisciplinary course in ecumenical theology at La Facoltà Valdese in January 2008, along with students from several other U.S. seminaries.

Pastor Claudio Pasquet Visits Upstate NY ~ Continued

We hope Rev. Pasquet learned as much from these conversations as we did! For me personally, the richest opportunities for learning came as we shuttled between meetings, visited Camp Fowler, and toured some of the region. We discussed our attempts to create a more vibrant spirituality in our churches, including Waldensian education programs to make the Bible come alive, the challenges and opportunities we see in North America and Europe, and what we can learn from each other about innovative approaches to mission programs to work on our societies' most difficult problems. When I told the counselors (mostly college students) that Rev. Pasquet came from a denomination that had been around since the 1100's, and let them know that every Waldensian minister has to spend a year overseas after seminary training, they were both curious and inspired by his presence. Some good conversations ensued.

We finished the visit convinced more than ever that having more interactions between our members in the United States and the Waldensians in Italy and South America can only help our shared mission of following Christ and serving the world, from our doorstep to places far across the oceans.

As to learning more about the United States, we visited the Saratoga Battlefield national historical park (where the British defeat in 1777 turned the tide of the American Revolution) and saw some of upstate New York. And, unfortunately, Rev. Pasquet discovered first-hand what Americans learn from the newspapers and their own experiences: our increasingly frequent flight delays and cancellations. On his way to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly in San Jose, Ca, Rev. Pasquet was scheduled to stop for a full Sunday at Kings Grant Presbyterian Church in Virginia Beach before coming to Schenectady. Problems getting out of JFK Airport in New York resulted in his having to cancel the Virginia leg of his travel and fly straight upstate instead.

We're sorry for Virginia's loss, but happy for a visit by Rev. Pasquet that we found rich in useful interactions, fellowship, shared insights, and a desire for increasingly frequent contact between our two churches.

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Director's Message from page 1



Day of Departure: 14 Participants of the Travel/Study Seminar to Italy undertaken by the Waldensian Heritage Museum and American Waldensian Society

L to R: Gretchen L. Costner, Exec. Director of the Museum, Rebecca Heilman, Nadine Duckworth, Judy Carr, Jewell Bounous, Frances Bounous, Barbara Wall, Naomi Rostan, Sheila Koch, Maxine & Don McCall, Linda & John Brackett

Familiar Faces at the 150 Year Celebration

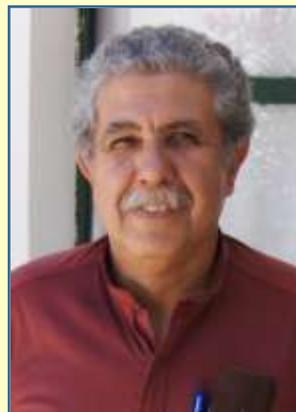
Photos By -
Dr. John Lafferty



*Rev. Carlos Delmonte,
Pastor Emeritus*



*Rev. Claudia Tron,
Co-Pastor San Gustavo*



*Rev. Miguel Cabrera,
Pastor Fray Bentos*



*Rev. Blanca Armand Pilón,
Pastor Colonia Valdense*



*Mabel Gonnet, Member
Mesa Valdense from
Montevideo*



*Lilo Zilgestra, Regional Secretary of
Alliance of Presbyterian & Reformed
Churches in Latin America*



*Milka Charbonnier, OPM
Secretary of Mesa
Valdense*



*Rev. Richardo Collazo,
Pastor Colonia
Miguelete*



*Rev. Ariel Charbonnier
led worship during the
Celebration*



*Ana Laura Bounous, Waldensian
Lay Person & Member of the Synod's
Historical Commission*



*Roger Geymonat, Author
of The School and the
Temple*



*Rev. Hugo Armand Pilón
signs 150th
commemoration letter*

Upcoming Dates to Remember:

October 10 - 11, 2008	Fall Board of Directors Meeting, NYC
October 11, 2008	AWS Members & Friends Dinner House of the Redeemer in New York City
November 14, 2008	December 2008 Newsletter Submission Deadline
March 21, 2009	Symposium on Immigration The Old Rock School, Valdese, NC
March 22 - 23, 2009	Spring Board of Directors Meeting, Valdese, NC

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