

# INTO THE LIGHT

Newsletter of the American Waldensian Society

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## An Interview with RADIO BECKWITH

**Matteo Scali** is the Director of Radio Beckwith Evangelica, a community-based radio station that broadcasts from Torre Pellice (Province of Torino) and is affiliated with the Waldensian Church. Since the 1980's, Radio Beckwith has sought to be an alternative source of news for people who seek perspectives other than those found in the corporate media.

**Matteo, how was Radio Beckwith Evangelica born? What ideals undergird this project and how have those ideals evolved over time?**

Radio Beckwith Evangelica (RBE) was established in 1984 by a group of young people who wanted to create community-based radio with strong links to the Waldensian Church. The idea first took shape during conversations at the *Bar Bistro* in Torre Pellice. Subsequent planning took place in the backroom of a local record store. The first transmission (a track by Lou Dalfin, a local band that plays Occitan music) was broadcast on November 1, 1984. During the first years, the station broadcast only a few hours per day and reached only a small area of the Val Pellice, probably from Torre Pellice to the nearby town of Luserna San Giovanni. The initial objective of RBE was to use radio as a means to evangelize and spread the message of the Bible. The founders of RBE wanted to reach elderly people who were homebound and to be an alternative point of reference when drug dealing began to be a significant problem into the Waldensian Valleys. For several years now, the young people of the Waldensian Valleys have orbited around RBE, and the station itself has become an important meeting point in the area. **Continued on page 6. . .**

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### NOTE FROM FRANCIS RIVERS

It is a pleasure to share with you this issue of the Society's newsletter. Here you will find articles about ministries taking place at the local level in Italy—the work of Radio Beckwith with young people in the Waldensian Valleys and Torino, the creation of a multiracial pastoral team for congregations in Bologna and Modena, the continuing education opportunities for clergy, lay leaders, and allied health care professional being prepared at the Villa Betania Hospital in Portici.

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## SERGIO VELLUTO SHARES DETAILS ABOUT NEW NOVEL

### **First of all, how did you get the idea to write a book on this subject?**

The idea came to me when the Director of the Waldensian Archives in Torre Pellice told me the history of the medieval Waldensian codices. It's a true and unbelievable story that I found very inspiring. It also reminded me, however, of the type of plots that you see in movies or read in thrillers and detective stories. I began to think that it would be interesting to write a novel based on a true story and not on fictitious events like the ones from which Dan Brown drew inspiration.

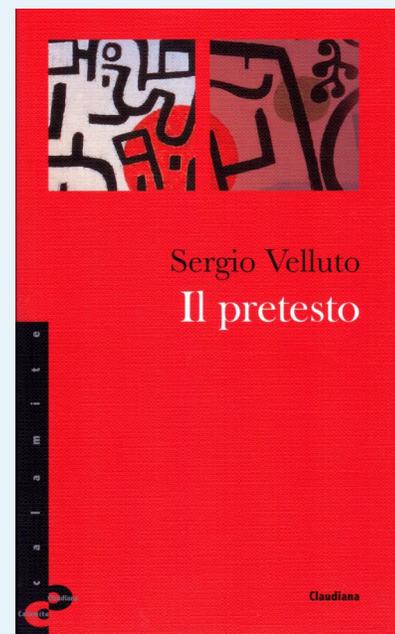
**Can you summarize the history that underlies the plot of your book?** The medieval Waldensian codices were books as small as a matchbox. The barba carried them throughout Europe. The size of the codices allowed the barba to hide them easily in their clothes. You have to remember that the barba were hunted by the Inquisition. If caught, a barba was arrested, tortured and burned at the stake. The barba did nothing more than preach the Gospel peacefully and heal the sick with herbal medicines. In the novel, I imagine that one of these codices, on display at the state archives in current-day Torino, is stolen for unknown reasons. I cannot tell you more without giving away the whole story.

**You say that your book is a thriller, but in addition to the theft of the codicil, the reader faces a succession of events that leads to the discovery of underground plots in which religion plays a vital role. Can you tell us about your passion for these issues? Where does it come from? Who inspired you?** I have been involved with the Waldensian Church since I was a boy. Moreover, I like adventure novels and thrillers. "Il pretesto" was an opportunity to combine both passions. I also think that the story of the Waldensians and these codices are something important for everybody to know about, because it represents the struggle for individual freedom. We know from history, in fact, that persons or groups in power often try to stamp out dissenting points of view and reduce everything to one vision of the world. In particular, freedom of religion is a fundamental right that must be guaranteed. It's hard for us today to understand the scope of the will for freedom that existed in the Middle Ages, a time when religious authority walked hand-in-hand with political power.

**The plot of "Il pretesto" is set in present day, but the events takes us back in time, making the Waldensian codices the real protagonist of your book. Behind the codices, of course, is the story of a small but tenacious religious community in Italy. Can you say more about the historical foundations of your book?** The book is based on true, historical events. As is the case with any history that is centuries old, however, gaps exist in our knowledge. I have tried to fill these gaps with my imagination. In the past, the medieval Waldensian codices were sought after by scholars of church history, because the codices represent the oldest confession of faith prior to the Protestant Reformation.

**You describe yourself as "born into a Waldensian family" and then "becoming Waldensian" yourself. You have written several books about the Waldensians in which you point out flaws and idiosyncrasies, always with great humor. Can you tell us more about your relationship with the Waldensians?** I think that the Waldensians, like everyone else, have to be self-critical with respect to their history and beliefs. Such humility is the only way to be able to listen to the arguments of others and to try to live peacefully in a globalized, multicultural world.

**Have you thought about making "Il pretesto" available to persons who don't read Italian?** The events I recount in the book take place in Europe and the United States. I'd like for the history of the Waldensian codices to be more well known, especially in France and America. I'm thinking of translating the book into English and French.



**"The Pretext"** is a novel by Sergio Velluto, President of the Consistory of the Waldensian Church of Torino. The book stands out from other representatives of the thriller genre, because the background of "Il Pretesto" is the medieval history of the Waldensian Church.

The story begins in modern-day Torino. Preparations are underway for an exhibit on "heretical books." The works in question are the so-called "Waldensian codices." Gloria, a Lecturer on Medieval Church History at the University of Torino, is the exhibit's curator. She sees the exhibit as an event that will enhance her professional reputation immeasurably. Suddenly-- just days before the exhibit is to open-- one of the codices is stolen. The theft launches a series of events that link the medieval past to the present as Gloria, in an attempt to recover the missing codicil, follows clues that lead her from Torino to Torre Pellice, up the Val di Susa, and into Lyons, France. Her journey through locales important to medieval Waldensian history brings to light secrets and intrigues, both old and new.

**We asked Sergio to tell us a little more about his novel.**

## A MUST READ FOR FAMILY HISTORIANS

By Vincente M. Martinez

**RELATIVE STRANGERS** tells the true story of Frank Cicero's immigrant Italian grandparents. Divided by religion, in their first decades in Chicago they lived and worshipped in separate churches—Presbyterian and Roman Catholic—less than two blocks apart in one of Chicago's largest Italian neighborhoods. For thirty years their paths never crossed until the author's parents met, fell in love and wed secretly over the opposition of both families. The author grew up with little understanding of the ancient origins of his maternal grandparents' Protestant faith that marked the keen differences between the two sides of his family. *Relative Strangers* details his search for their religious roots in Northern Italy and Sicily, their immigration, and the first decades of their lives in Chicago.

*Relative Strangers: Italian Protestants in the Catholic World* by Chicago attorney, Frank Cicero, Jr., is a must read for anyone who is trying to trace their family history. Not unlike many third generation American descendants of Western European ancestry, Cicero, who was born in Chicago had only a basic understanding about his Italian ancestry. Through family lore he knew his maternal grandparents were from northern Italy and that his paternal grandparents were from Sicily. He was raised Presbyterian and experienced first-hand the religious differences between his father's Cicero family, who were all Roman Catholic, and his mother's Balma family who were Protestant, but he did not fully understand the origin of these differences. In this well written account Cicero explains through family history, genealogy and religion, how his parents met and what obstacles they may have overcome in order to marry in this environment.

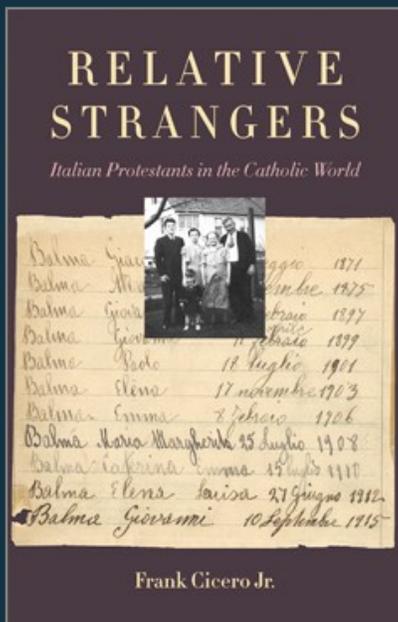
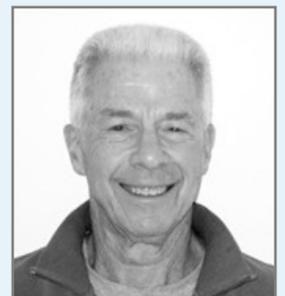
As with most family historians the curiosity about family origins and questions about economic, socio-political, and religious differences can begin early in life, but sometimes it is not until later that the actual search begins. An old photograph, a family story, a letter, or a book can be the spark that ignites that search. For Cicero it began while he was working on a lawsuit in Paris with the discovery of a book in an obscure bookstore about the origins of the Protestant Waldensians that took root in the predominantly Roman Catholic Piedmont region of northern Italy.

The Catholic/Protestant story of conflict is a universal one and Cicero provides the reader with an excellent overview about a little known but fascinating sect known as Waldensians, a legacy of the Protestant Reform. With origins over 800 years ago it was able to withstand centuries of persecution by both the Roman Catholic Church and the political rulers in Europe. Though it was successfully transplanted to Italian neighborhoods in the United States, Cicero traces how the Balma's faith merged with other mainstream Protestant churches.

This study covers three generations of Cicero's paternal and maternal ancestors and details the geographical origins of the families, the likely decisions leading to emigration, the passage from Italy to the United States, and the struggles endured by the new immigrants in the cities of Buffalo and Chicago. Cicero's work in France gave him the unique opportunity to begin exploring his roots, particularly in Sicily—Montemaggiore and Valledolmo—and he gives detailed accounts of his travels. Of most interest is that he relied on primary contacts, with no referrals, in Sicily during his initial travels there over the years. Fortunately the people he met led him to the other contacts and important primary documents that he needed. Not everyone exploring his or her roots is afforded such an opportunity.

Only years of meticulous research could have produced such a well-written and detailed family history as revealed in this book. It is also a great study of religious differences and immigrant lifestyles not unlike those shared by a multitude of people who come to the United States seeking a better way of life.

**FRANK CICERO** is a trial and appellate lawyer. He is a member of numerous professional societies, including the American College of Trial Lawyers and the *Società di Studi Valdesi*. Just this past October, Frank joined the Board of the American Waldensian Society.



## BEING CHURCH TOGETHER IN ACTION IN BOLOGNA AND MODENA

After decades of seeing its citizens go abroad to find work and livelihood, Italy today is a country of immigration. The arrival in mass of a variety of racial and ethnic groups during the past 20 years has forged a new social and religious landscape in the “bel paese.” In turn, this diversity has caused significant tensions and misunderstandings that are obliging both Italians and immigrants to take seriously the challenges that social and religious integration pose.

The Federation of Italian Protestant Churches (FCEI) has been committed to ministry with immigrants for decades. In the 1980’s, the Federation established assistance programs that provided an initial contact with arriving immigrants. These services, although crucial, proved insufficient to initiate dialogue with new, rapidly expanding immigrant communities. More recently, the federation’s “**Being Church Together Program**” has sought to focus attention on—and address—the challenges that congregations face when immigrants and Italians search for ways to share leadership with one another.

Religion is a strong element of identity for both immigrants and Protestants in Italy. Religion is, therefore, an essential medium through which immigrants can connect with Waldensian and Methodist congregations. The desire of the Federation for greater, more open communication with immigrant communities led to the idea of an “Intercultural Pastoral Team.” Inaugurated in the Methodist congregations of Bologna and Modena, the initiative involves two pastors—one Italian (Michel Charbonnier), the other Ghanaian (Dennis Boadu). The journeys of these two men and their respective faith communities began years ago in different settings. These narratives have now intersected in Italy. The question is whether or not these two communities can find enough common ground to walk together into the future.

Hoping for a shared path is Rev. Boadu from Ghana. Upon arriving in Italy, he dreamt of forming a Ghanaian church in Rome. The project encountered innumerable problems and had to be suspended. From this difficult experience emerged the idea of having Boadu move to Bologna/Modena in order to collaborate with Rev. Michel Charbonnier. The congregations in Bologna and Modena have the same pastor, because the Methodist church of Modena is a “diaspora” of the church in Bologna. For generations, membership in both congregations has been almost exclusively Italian. More recently, however, a high rate of immigration has changed the demographics of the Protestant communities dramatically. The church in Modena suddenly had more than 100 members, 95% of whom were not Italian but Ghanaian. Members of the “diaspora” of Modena attempted initially to segregate the two communities. Compelling reasons existed for this course of action. The majority of Ghanaians did not speak Italian. The church in Modena was barely large enough to house the Italian congregation of 15-20 people, much less 100 or more Ghanaian worshippers. The leadership of the Ghanaian community decided to move to a larger locale, a warehouse on the edge of town. Although respecting this decision, the Italian leadership of the church in Bologna was concerned that zoning laws prohibited the warehouse chosen by the Ghanaians from being designated as a “church,” thus exposing the Ghanaian congregation to the risk that local authorities could file and execute an eviction notice.

This situation highlighted the need for a strategy that could harness the strengths of both the Italian and Ghanaian congregations. The assumption underlying the “intercultural pastoral team” approach is that Rev. Boadu and Rev. Charbonnier can work together to coordinate the three places of worship (Bologna, Modena, Modena-Periphery) in order to foster an environment of dialogue that forestall separation on ethnic or linguistic grounds.



**Pictured Far Right: Michel Charbonnier**  
**Middle: Dennis Boadu**

# BEING CHURCH TOGETHER IN ACTION IN BOLOGNA AND MODENA

## **Rev. Charbonnier, what was the genesis of the "intercultural pastoral team" and what is the current status of this initiative?**

From the very beginning, the project has been understood as a partnership between Rev. Boadu and myself. What we did not want to do, in fact, was to repeat the classic model in which the Italian pastor takes care of the Italian community and that the Ghanaian pastor takes care of the Ghanaian community. That being said, it is clear that the project of an "intercultural pastoral team" is a work in progress. We will address various issues but try always to be aware of what the needs of the communities are. At the moment, we are still in the process of getting organized. For example, Rev. Boadu needs time to acquire the tools he needs to interact with the Italian component of the congregation. We are working together to achieve this goal, but at the moment, both for linguistic reasons (Boadu's Italian is still somewhat limited) and because of his deep understanding of the problems of the immigrant community, Rev. Boadu is focusing more on the Ghanaian component of Modena.

## **What are some of the ways in which the two components of the Modena congregation- the Italians and the Ghanaians- differ the most?**

Between the Italian-speaking communities and the Ghanaians there are many differences, especially a varying understanding of the church and pastoral ministry. The Ghanaian see the necessity of the pastor primarily during worships, because many lay leaders manage the day-to-day affairs of the church. What Pastor Boadu and I are trying to figure out is how to organize the church. First of all, additional training for these "leaders" is desperately needed. In fact, they need precise information about how the Church in Italy is organized and what it means to have leadership responsibilities within the polity of the Waldensian/Methodist Church. On the other hand, it also is often necessary--and this is the fundamental contribution of Pastor Boadu--to provide guidance on the structure of the Ghanaian churches to the Ghanaians! We are discovering that many people who currently play a leadership role in these churches did not have similar responsibilities in their country of origin. We think that this phenomenon reflects the rather common tendency of individuals to become more connected to religion in contexts of migration. This work with the "leaders" occurs within the larger organizational structure of the church, which must be a sort of fusion between the Ghanaian and Italian models. Members of the immigrant community should be able to participate actively in a form of church governance with which they feel comfortable, but there must also be compatibility between this form of governance and the polity of the Italian church. Another important task to which Rev. Boadu and I are committed is the creation of an accurate, up-to-date church roll for the Ghanaian community. At the moment, in fact, the Ghanaian portion of our congregation does not appear in the national statistics of the Waldensian/Methodist Church. This situation has economic consequences, because without such recognition, the Ghanaian community does not have access to funds through the Methodist board in Italy. In fact, until now, the Ghanaian community has shouldered its own expenses, a burden that has become increasingly difficult because of the financial crisis and subsequent rise in unemployment.

## **Do you have a sense of the challenges that the community will face in the near future?**

Of course, everything depends on the testimony that the church wants to give, but Pastor Boadu and I have long understood that the Ghanaian community does not want to remain an "ethnic church." The Ghanaians want to be a part of the Italian Methodist church and to be able to welcome everyone. In order to achieve this goal, however, we must work hard at various levels. For example, liturgy is very important. At present, worship is conducted exclusively in one of the local language of Ghana and in a style that is markedly Ghanaian. For this reason, Rev. Boadu and I are trying to find ways that not only allow the Ghanaian community to maintain its specificity, but also help and encourage the Ghanaians to adapt to the Italian context. In addition to the challenges of liturgy and worship, there is the task of trying to facilitate dialogue between the Ghanaian community and the Italian one on fundamental aspects of our shared faith such as how we read and interpret the Bible. Finally, we must solve the problem of finding a place of worship that the Ghanaian and Italian-speaking communities can share and in which both groups feel at home with one another. As of yet, we have not been able to find a place that can be devoted to such use and that is suitable to host the activities of the churches. This is very important because the history of the church in Modena has taught us how much practical issues can affect the life of a congregation.

## Radio Beckwith Director Scali Interview Continued . . .

Today RBE broadcasts 24 hours a day, seven days a week on two FM frequencies (87.8-96.55). The possibility also exists to utilize our website [www.rbe.it](http://www.rbe.it) to stream our broadcasts or watch them on DTTV. These options exist thanks to the work of the RBE editorial team, which consists of eight journalists and two technicians. We also have approximately 80 volunteers who assist the staff. Every one of the volunteers contributes in a unique way, offering his/her professional experience and connecting the radio to other organizations, even non-church related ones. The radio, in this sense, is meant as a permanent laboratory for social participation: a variety of people can communicate with one another in hope that such interactions will result in greater mutual understanding.

The radio is managed by the non-profit organization "*Francesco Lo Bue*." This arrangement makes RBE a unique reality in Italy. In fact, the vision at the heart of RBE is to continue the work of Charles Beckwith, the English Lieutenant-Colonel who in the nineteenth century promoted a number of important initiatives in the Waldensian Valleys—a high school for girls, the homes for professors in Torre Pellice, the churches in Rodoretto, Torre Pellice and Rorà and, in addition, the construction of about 170 elementary schools, the so-called "Beckwith schools."

Since 2010, RBE has had a second office in Torino. The office cooperates closely with the Waldensian congregation. In taking this step, RBE hopes to bring its experience as a community-based radio station to the tasks of ministry and evangelization in a big city like Torino.

### **What are the main themes you address in your broadcasts? Are there particular issues that Radio Beckwith Evangelica wants to emphasize?**

We can divide the issues we deal with into three main categories. The first is *ethics and social information*. RBE is quite detached from the logic of the mainstream media. Accordingly, RBE can on the one hand, communicate the news in an ethical way (e.g., not using terms that foment stereotypes or induce prejudice) and, on the other hand, focus on issues that the mainstream media ignores (e.g. human rights, secularism, local politics, mafia, linguistics, ethnic minorities, etc...)

The second main category is *church life and the involvement* of young Protestants in their local communities. RBE guarantees that a variety of points of view are included in the programs it produces. This commitment is reflected in the training sessions we have with young people. Participants have the opportunity to conduct radio broadcast in which they can express their different faith perspectives. At the moment, RBE is beginning to create a network among congregations in northwestern Italy in order to connect the different communities scattered throughout the territory.

The third important category is *music and culture*. The RBE staff promotes many local musical productions and cultural initiatives. We hope in this way to help our listeners and the people in the area have some important civic experiences.

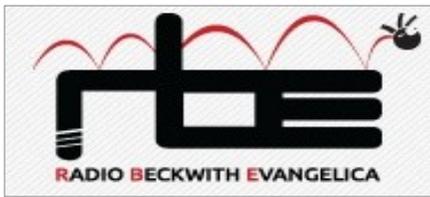
### **Cultural and social projects in Italy are in trouble because of the financial crisis. All too often there also exists the impression that these kinds of projects are not "productive." What are your thoughts on these matters?**

Unfortunately, during the past several months, RBE has experienced financial difficulties. A primary cause is the financial cuts that the Italian government authorized in the fields of culture and publishing. Another reason for our financial problems is a drop in advertising revenue due to the global financial crisis. This loss of income forced us to face the possibility that RBE might not be able to survive after 2011. In response to these developments, we initiated a fund raising campaign. Hundreds of individuals, organizations and congregations supported the effort to keep RBE alive.

Thanks to this extraordinary effort, RBE was able to close 2011 only 3,000 Euros in debt, a drop in the bucket compared to the deficits that originally confronted us. However, I also want to underscore the fact that "crisis" implies "opportunities for renewal." As a result of our experience in 2011, we've started developing strategies that will help us be better prepared for future financial crises. **UPDATE:** At the Spring Board Meeting of the Society, May 18-19, the board unanimously voted to send a \$1500 contribution to the general fund of the RBE as a gesture of support for this ministry.

### **What do you think makes Radio Beckwith unique? Why is it important that this station continue to exist?**

RBE is the only structured Protestant radio station in Italy. Its loss would deal a serious blow to religious and cultural pluralism in a country that obviously has many difficulties in this field. Being a minority in a country in which the predominant religion is Roman Catholicism makes it essential to stay in touch with other realities. That's why RBE seeks to come into daily contact with people who do not belong to the Waldensian Church and may not even be Protestants. We want to discuss our point of view with everyone but not with the goal of changing anyone's mind. At the same time, we accept without prejudice the points of view of others.



The challenge for RBE is how NOT to close ourselves in a ghetto and to communicate only with people who already share our ideas and values. On the contrary, we need to be open to dialogue and to propose a non-judgmental model of communication. This approach doesn't mean that we give up talking about the Bible or Jesus, but it means ensuring pluralistic and democratic access to these issues. In fact, we are not a "confessional radio": RBE was never meant to be a place for proselytism. Our primary mission is to produce culture. Inside this pluralistic framework, the story of the Bible is one piece of an ever more complex mosaic of faith.

### **How would you summarize your experience as the director of Radio Beckwith?**

It's not an easy job. I not only coordinate the work of the staff and volunteers, but also am involved in every step of the production process--from public relations to technical problem solving. I do not mean, of course, that the work itself is chaotic, but the radio sometimes places superhuman demands on all of us. Deadlines are deadlines and must be respected. It helps me to remember that I'm just a human being and that the relationship between human beings and machines is always very tiring.

At the same time, everything at RBE is done in a democratic way. Working in such a setting is a privilege, a privilege that imposes important responsibilities. I believe that RBE serves as an example of democracy and is a reference point for many people in the Waldensian Valleys and beyond. Both the programming at RBE and the way in which staff and volunteers work together are unique, at least in Italy.

## **Dr. Letizia Tomassone Participates in the 2012 Spring Board Meeting of AWS**

During its 2012 Spring Meeting, the AWS Board of Directors was pleased to host The Reverend Doctor Letizia Tomassone. She is a native of the Valle d'Aosta in the extreme, northwestern corner of Italy. She attended and graduated from La Facolta' Valdese in Rome and did her doctoral work at the University of Montpellier. Letizia has served several congregations in Italy and for five years was the Director of the Agape Ecumenical Center in Prali. Although currently on a nine-month sabbatical in the United States, she remains the pastor of two congregations (La Spezia and Carrara) that lie on either side of the border that separates the Regions of Liguria and Toscana. She also is the Vice-President of the Federation of Italian Protestant Churches (FCEI).

Letizia has spent her sabbatical at the Graduate Theological Union in the San Francisco Bay Area. Essential to helping Letizia arrive at GTU were the efforts of The Reverend Doctor Gabriella Lettini, former President of the AWS Board and current Dean of the Starr King School for the Ministry. Gabriella provided the administrative support necessary for Letizia to comply with the immigration requirements that the role of a visiting professor entail.

While at GTU, Letizia has devoted her scholarly attention to the theological theme of the sanctity of creation—not just of human creatures, but of all creation. Speaking to the AWS Board and members of Waldensian Presbyterian Church, Letizia spoke of her growing conviction that the earth is the body of God and deserves, therefore, careful and reverent treatment.

The experience of living in the Bay Area also has provided Letizia with the opportunity to interact with African American congregations and scholars. She has been especially delighted with and grateful for her exposure to the writings of Howard Thurman. She also has gained new perspectives on the African-American church and community through the mundane task of helping her 18-year-old son, Samuele, do his homework. In fact, a curriculum focus of the high school that Samuele attends in Berkeley, CA, is the African American experience in the United States. Both Letizia and Samuele acknowledge how meaningful and thought-provoking this exposure to an important but often neglected aspect of U.S. history has been to them, especially given the ever-increasing reality of ethnic, racial, and religious pluralism in Italy.

Letizia will return to Italy in early-July 2012. She is grateful for the opportunity she has had to take a step back from her pastoral responsibilities in the Waldensian Church. She returns home with new ideas and a fresh perspective on her ministry. Her greatest hope, Letizia says, is that other Waldensian pastors and lay leaders might have a similar opportunity for a sabbatical of some sort, even if of shorter duration and not located necessarily in an academic setting.



## VILLA BETANIA: AN EVOLVING MINISTRY IN NAPLES

It is a known fact that the area of Naples has many pockets of poverty and marginalization. Districts like Portici and Ponticelli remain today places in which basic services are missing and the daily life of citizens is very difficult. In these neighborhoods, the presence of the Protestant church (especially Methodists) has a long and important tradition of diaconal work. The best known examples are "Casa materna" (an orphanage, now closed), "Casa mia" (a center that works to prevent truancy and juvenile marginalization), and the hospital "Villa Betania".

The origins of the hospital date back to the end of World War II and the relentless work and faith of three brothers—Fabio, Teofilo and Emanuele Santi—who were respectively an attorney, a pastor and a doctor. The men were sons of Riccardo Santi, a Methodist minister and the founder of "Casa materna." The efforts of Teofilo were especially significant. He was able to form a healthcare network composed not only of Italian physicians and medical students, but also U.S. military chaplains. These chaplains were able to obtain medical supplies and collect funds to provide services in areas of Naples that had been ravaged by the war. The actual construction of the hospital, however, did not occur until the 1960s. Prudent stewardship of funds and of lands obtained during the previous years made possible this accomplishment. Also important was the support of Italian and European churches. Personalities such as Glenn Garfield Williams and Leslie Cooke of the Council of Churches were enthusiastic backers of the project.

Villa Betania Hospital was founded in 1968 by the joint efforts of the Apostolic Church, the Adventist Church, the Baptist Church, the Christian Church in Vomero, the Lutheran Church, the Methodist Church, the Salvation Army and the Waldensian Church. The leadership of these churches envisioned Villa Betania as an example of Christian witness and a place in which the patient was to be treated like a brother or sister in Christ. The hospital was also to be a place in which a global concept of health (that is, attention to physical, psychological and spiritual needs) guided treatment and in which everyone, regardless of religious affiliation, could receive medical care according to the principles of compassion and humanity, service and efficiency, innovation and integration.



The Foundation "Betania" oversees the operations of the "Ospedale evangelico Villa Betania." The interests of the Foundation, however, are not limited to the hospital but take into consideration the larger context of Naples. Accordingly, the Foundation has organized conferences on the topic of bioethics (focusing especially on the doctor-patient relationship and issues related to end of life care), as well as the new forms of urban poverty and what acts of solidarity are possible. Many of these initiatives take place at "Casa Mia – Emilio Nitti," which the Foundation manages. The Foundation also maintains a chaplaincy service in which a Protestant pastor trained in counseling attends to the daily spiritual needs of patients.

The attention that the Foundation has paid to the issue of new forms of poverty intersects with the challenges related to the increasing presence of immigrants in Naples and the Region of Campania. The Italian Protestant Churches, in an effort to renew their ministry and witness, have found - thanks to a research project conducted by the "Being Church Together" Program of the Federation of Italian Protestant Churches (FCEI) —that immigration is a key component of any revitalization effort. In recent years, Italy has become a corridor of immigration into Europe. Immigrants, however, often find themselves the objects of discrimination and exploitation. As a result, immigrants constitute one of the most vulnerable sectors of society.

The economic crisis has worsened the plight of persons, like immigrants, who live on the fringes of Italian society. According to recent statistics, the number of people living in poverty in Italy has doubled during the last three years, and Naples is the city in which the largest gap exists between rich and poor. For these reasons, the Waldensian/Methodist Church is developing programs through which to renew its ministry and witness in this region.

"Our idea," says Alessandra Trotta, President of the Work of the Methodist Protestant Churches in Italy (OPCEMI), "is still taking shape, but we are moving in the direction of a series of coordinated initiatives that address the particular challenges of Naples and its surroundings. The project includes different kind of interventions in different parts of the territory, coordinated among themselves and with the maximum involvement of churches and diaconal institutions that have operated in the area for decades." In particular, she continues, "the recovery of places like Vico Tiratoio in Naples will seek to create a place in which citizens can meet and socialize, where different ethnic and religious communities can share their own experiences. We envision a place for the promotion of contact and dialogue not only between the different communities, but also with the institutions of the city. "

If some of these projects are still just ideas, others already have become reality. Thanks to financial assistance from the “8 per mille” fund of the Waldensian/Methodist Church, the project "Prendiamoci cura di lei" (Let's Take Care of Her), provides women without a residency permit free, preventive screening for vaginal and cervical cancer. In order to explain the services that the project offers and to underscore the importance of such screening, the leaders of the project have produced a brochure, translated it into English, French, Romanian, Polish, Albanian, Russian, Arabic, and Chinese, and distributed this material in places where immigrants gather. The hospital also provides free care to immigrants of various nationalities (many of whom do not have a residency permit) when these persons arrive in the emergency room, often after having been denied care at other hospitals.

Thinking more specifically about the future of Villa Betania, Trotta notes that “we would like to organize a linguistic and cultural mediation service that facilitates access to the healthcare system for immigrants. Our priority at present is on gynecological and neonatal services, but we also would like to establish a center that specializes in multicultural pastoral care and that eventually could emerge as the Italian branch of a specialized program in the United States. The first, exploratory contacts for this project began in March with representatives from the American Waldensian Society. The delegation included Francis Rivers, AWS Executive Director; Alfredo and Rosa Blanca Miranda, Presbyterian pastors; and Kristin Langstraat, a United Methodist pastor and CPE Supervisor who served for four years as a mission volunteer in Italy.”



**R to L: Francis Rivers, Kristin Langstraat, Rosa Blanca Miranda & Alfredo Miranda**

**We asked Leonardo Circa, Vice-President of “Fondazione Betania,” to discuss some of the challenges he faces in managing the hospital. What are the problems that occur most commonly in caring for an immigrant patient?**

Last year there was a government circular which required doctors to report any immigrant who entered the hospital without a residency permit. The circular was withdrawn almost immediately but it sparked much debate, and there have been cases of complaints. We at Villa Betania have always been very attentive to the problems of immigrants in Italy. Accordingly, we refused to denounce any of our patients. The Region of Campania, in terms of the number of immigrants, has changed from a region that hosts immigrants for short periods of time (in the past, many immigrants simply passed through Campania on their way to northern Italy) to a region characterized by a high percentage of permanent settlement. In fact, due to the economic crisis, even those immigrants who had moved to other regions have returned to Campania, primarily because “survival” in Naples (for economic reasons but also due to social networks and greater tolerance) is easier than in Milan. In addition, a substantial Rom community has established itself in Naples (Rom are nomadic gypsies of Romanian/Bulgarian/Yugoslavian descent. The majority of Rom are legal but not tolerated by Italian society.) Their presence has sparked violent reactions throughout the population. It's important to note that the prevention programs that lay the groundwork for the establishment of our hospital roughly fifty years ago (especially programs related to women's health) were reserved for the Italian population in the Ponticelli district. Now, as illustrated by the initiative “Let's Take Care of Her, these programs are needed for the immigrant population and the marginalized.



**Leonard Circa**

**So the campaigns for prevention have similarities with those of the past. Are there any notable differences?**

The current prevention campaigns present even greater challenges, because now we are meeting people who speak different languages and come from different cultural and religious traditions. Working competently in this context requires more extensive preparation for healthcare professionals and hospital staff who come into contact with such persons. We have seen these challenges first-hand in our project "Let's Take Care of Her." We interact with women from China, Arabic countries, Africa and Eastern Europe. According to her socio-cultural background, each of these women has a different understanding of preventative care. It is essential for us to know their problems, beliefs and religious sensibilities in order to be able to relate with them, especially since the medical procedures and subsequent discussions involve very intimate topics.

## VILLA BETANIA CONTINUED. . .

**So the tools of intercultural sensitivity are very important in a hospital like yours. How are these skills useful in practical terms?**

The theme of cultural mediation (starting with the language problem) is absolutely crucial. All the different spheres of culture (for example, dietary habits and nutrition) have an impact on the life of a hospital like Villa Betania. We must know what dietary restrictions exist in a given culture or religion. Given these challenges, we see quite favorably proposals like the one from the American Waldensian Society that would like to create an intercultural training course not only for the doctors and nurses of our hospital, but also open to the other hospitals in Naples. The logic of opening up the hospital to the outside is absolutely necessary, because the whole of society needs to be prepared to understand the changing reality around us. Because of this need, we would be happy to activate a program that focuses attention on appropriate care for the multiethnic, multicultural patient. It would be desirable if we were able to devise a plan to be submitted in September and that could become operational early next year. To this effort we will offer not only logistical support, but also our experience in this field. (UPDATE: Since the March visit, the proposal has been realized, see the brochure on page 11 to be released in June.)

**The emphasis of Villa Betania on global care of the patient seems to be a good model to follow. What are some characteristics that make your hospital different from other ones?**

The hospital is in this regard very advanced. For example, we have on staff a clinical psychologist who provides psychological support for our patients, especially people with cancer but also women with gynecological problems. Traditionally, of course, we also provide spiritual care to those who desire it. Therefore, our chaplain is himself a cultural mediator for those who do not wish the spiritual care of the Protestant tradition, or more in general, the Christian faith. Villa Betania is a Protestant hospital but not a denominational hospital, our approach remains secular. Precisely because of these characteristics, the hospital enjoys a good reputation among the population. We are the only hospital in the eastern area of Naples and since 2008 - because of cuts to health care that caused several providers to close their doors - more and more people of all backgrounds are utilizing our emergency department.

## THE SOCIETY IS PLANNING . . .

The Executive Director, Francis Rivers, the Office Administrator, Sheila Young, and board members from Valdese, NC; Carolyn Pascal Williams and Mary-Louise Pascal Hatley traveled to New York City to celebrate the February 17th celebration with members of the former Waldensian Church of New York. It was a bitter sweet affair. On one hand, it was a celebration and the addition of the AWS group to the gathering was lively and entertaining. On the other hand, the locals were remembering their brother and long-time AWS member, Edgar Moutoux, who passed away last Fall. Edgar left the Society a generous bequest. Additionally, they were shocked from the unexpected death of their sister and long-time AWS member, Ida Paschetto, on the 17th itself. Adrienne Van Dyke who typically manages the details of the day was absent as well. The Society received a thoughtful thank you note from Irene Stewart who graciously picked up the planning to finalize the day. She writes: *It was really a great opportunity to be with our Waldensian "roots" from North Carolina and share a day of fellowship. The sadness was there, no Adrienne, the loss of Edgar, and the very sudden loss of Ida, the day before the service. It was a blessing for you all to be with us- and to bolster the spirits of our small, faithful gathering! Hopefully, this will be the start of a wonderful, annual tradition.*

A terrific idea arose at the luncheon later in the afternoon. Why not plan a three-day bus trip from NYC to Valdese, NC for more fellowship with extended Waldensian family and friends. Many have not seen in years and need to see the extensive renovations to the museum and community. Some have children and grandchildren they expressed an interest in sharing the Waldensian story with them. If you are interested in such a trip in April or May of 2013, we want to hear from you! Please write or email the AWS office with your intentions to participate and which weekend would work best for you and your family. We look forward to hearing from you!



## EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

A continuing education opportunity for **pastors, Christian educators and congregational leaders**

- involved in **multicultural ministries**
- motivated to undertake an **international experience**

## DATES

January 13 - 21

## ITALY

ROME

## PROGRAM

The program will be coordinated jointly by:

- The **American Waldensian Society (AWS)**
- The **Being Church Together Program (BCT)**, the intercultural initiative of the **Federation of Italian Protestant Churches**. The Federation includes **Waldensians (Presbyterians), Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals and Seven Day Adventists**
- **Facoltà Valdese di Teologia**, the Waldensian Seminary in Rome

Logistics and Organization provided by the interfaith co-operative, **Confronti** ([www.confronti.net](http://www.confronti.net))

## COST

\$ 800 per person (subject to exchange rates)  
Includes lodging in a double room + trips + organization fees, not including the flight to Italy.



Christian Witness between North and South:  
Full Immersion in the Mediterranean Context  
Waldensian School of Theology  
Rome - ITALY  
January 2013

## Christian Witness Between North and South Full Immersion in the Mediterranean Context

Waldensian School of Theology  
Rome, Italy  
January 2013

### 01/13 Sunday

Arrival in Rome:

**Welcome and Reception at La Casa Valdese**

### 01/14 Monday

**Historical, Social and Religious Highlights of Italy.**

Daniele Garrone, Professor of Hebrew Bible,  
Waldensian School of Theology

### The Mediterranean--North & South: A Global Approach

Paolo Naso, Professor of Political Science,  
La Sapienza University

**Evening Session:** Comparison of US and Italian perspectives

### 01/15 Tuesday

**Ecumenism. An Italian Protestant Perspective**

Daniele Garrone and others

**Visits to sites of interest in Rome**

**Evening Session:** Comparison of US and Italian perspectives

### 01/16 Wednesday

**Interfaith Dialogue in a Hegemonic, Un-Pluralistic Context**  
(The Confronti Cooperative)

**Visit to the Mosque of Rome**

**The Arab Spring(s): New Opportunities, New Challenges?**

**Evening Session:** Comparison of US and Italian Perspectives

### 01/17 Thursday

**Secularism, Church Decline, and a Religious Minority Paradigm**

Enrico Benedetto, Professor of Practical Theology,  
Waldensian School of Theology

### Visits in Rome

**Evening Session:** Comparison of US and Italian Perspectives

### 01/18 Friday

**Protestants, Pentecostals, and Evangelicals:**

**Dialogue or Competition?**

International Panel moderated by Paolo Naso

**Evening Session:** Comparison of US and Italian Perspectives

### 01/19 Saturday

**Healing and Miracles: Which Theological Approach?**

Pastors and Lay Leaders in the Being Church Together Program

### Human Trafficking and the Role of Gender in Immigration

Rev. Vivian Wivoloku

**Evening Session:** Comparison of US and Italian Perspectives

### 01/20 Sunday

**Worship**

**Evaluation of the Seminar**

**Free Time in Rome**

### 01/21 Monday

Departure

For registration information contact the AWS Office:

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[www.waldensian.org](http://www.waldensian.org) • [info@waldensian.org](mailto:info@waldensian.org)

## Note from Executive Director, Francis Rivers



This kind of detailed, in-depth information has become available to the Society—and to you—thanks to a newly established collaboration with Mr. Michele Lipori, a journalist who works on the staff of *Notizie Evangeliche*, the press agency of the Federation of Italian Protestant Churches. During the past year, several members of the Society’s Executive Committee have had the opportunity to meet Michele in person. We plan to invite Michele to the Fall 2012 Board

Meeting so that he can meet the rest of the Board and obtain a first-hand look at the work of the Society. The meeting will take place in Libertyville, IL, in early October. If Michele’s schedule allows, he may also visit Waldensian Presbyterian Church and the Waldensian Heritage Museum in Valdese, NC.

The willingness of Michele to collaborate with AWS enables us to have unprecedented access to the work of the Waldensian Church at the local and regional levels. If there are congregations, projects or themes in the life of the church that you would like to see included in the newsletter, please don’t hesitate to let the AWS staff know. Thank you, as always, for your support of the American Waldensian Society.

## NEW EDITOR

The AWS Board voted in October 2010 to hire a part time editor for the Society’s newsletter. In October 2011, the Society’s Executive Committee voted to offer this position to Michele Lipori. He is the author of most of the articles in this edition of the newsletter. Michele grew up in the Italian Baptist Church and studied anthropology in college. He currently works on the staff of both *Confronti* and *Protestantesimo*, publications well known in and representative of the concerns of Italian Protestants and their ecumenical and interfaith partners.



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