

INTO THE LIGHT

Newsletter of the American Waldensian Society

ISSUE 02 NOVEMBER 2012



WALDENSIAN SYNOD 2012 SUMMARY

The annual synod meeting of the Waldensian/Methodist Church took place this year in Torre Pellice, Province of Torino, from August 26 – 31. The synod opened with a worship service that featured the ordination of pastor Willy Jourdan and deacon Rossella Luci. The **Rev. Eliana Briante**, pastor of the Methodist Church of Milano, led the service. Rev. Briante based her sermon on Acts 3: 1-10, in which Peter says to the lame person, "Get up and walk."

Rev. Briante underscored the point that the healing of the sick person was accompanied by a sermon: "Peter says clearly that he has no wealth to offer the poor cripple but willingly shares with him the love of Christ. Contained in the phrase 'Get up and walk' is a call to a new life." Just as Peter does not offer money but a "human touch," so the Church, too, must be committed to an "emancipatory deaconship" that is not limited to impersonal financial assistance but seeks to change the lives of those who suffer in need. In fact, something remarkable and unexpected occurs in this text. Not only is the lame person healed, but he becomes a protagonist. He stands up and starts walking, jumping and praising God. This scene causes surprise in the reader because an "outsider" prays and praises the Lord in a way that "may be too noisy and chaotic but also is extremely compelling." Such an experience is increasingly frequent in Protestant congregations in Italy that are being renewed by the presence of immigrants who bring with them a new spirituality and a passion for praising God.

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NEW MODERATOR ADDRESS

I wish to begin my comments with the reminder that Ephesians 4:1 calls us to "lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called." This text offers a word of challenge to all Christians, but places additional expectations on persons elected to office in the church. The appeal to behave in a worthy manner reminds us that as Christians, we live no longer for ourselves, but as servants of Jesus Christ--and as representatives of the faith community in which we live and members of the universal church to which we belong. This exhortation long has guided my pastoral ministry.

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2012 WALDENSIAN SYNOD RECAP Continued ...

On August 27, the Synod hosted a public forum that was attended by many important personalities from the Italian religious and political worlds, including the Minister of the Italian Republic for International Cooperation and Integration, **Mr. Andrea Riccardi**. The forum was dedicated to the integration of immigrant communities into Italian public life and to the daunting challenges that unemployment poses for both Italian and immigrant young people. Immigrant, young adults who are members of Protestant churches in Italy shared their experiences and struggles. **Mr. Claudio Paravati**, General Secretary of the Federation of Italian Protestant Youth (FGEI), and **Professor Paolo Naso**, National Coordinator of the "Being Church Together Program of the Federation of Italian Protestant Churches (FCEI), also spoke. In his comments, Paravati noted that "We should stop defining our brothers and sisters as 'immigrants.' Even saying that they are a 'second generation' of immigrants is misleading because the term does not help us understand the fact that the presence of these brothers and sisters has become a permanent and structural feature of Italian society." Paravati went on to stress that the FGEI and the youth groups of local congregations are places of integration in which experiences of intercultural communion and dialogue occur with a frequency not yet seen in Italian society as a whole

Professor Naso sounded similar themes. "We are late in beginning this conversation because we have had the illusion that - unlike the rest of Europe - immigration to Italy was a transient and reversible phenomenon. Now we have to play catch up and find ways to address issues of citizenship, rights and duties for those persons from other countries who live permanently in Italy. It's about building a 'pact of coexistence' in which, always aware and respectful of our different backgrounds and tradition, Italians and immigrants recognize themselves as members of a civilized community."

Minister Riccardi expressed his appreciation for the contribution that the Italian Protestant Churches are making in the field of reception and integration of immigrants. He, too, stressed the need for a change of perspective in Italy.

Members of the Synod discussed several important issues. Among the topics were deacons, Bioethics and the environment. In terms of bioethics, the Synod welcomed a recent ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg about current Italian legislation on assisted procreation. The Italian law forbids techniques such as cloning, the sale of embryos, surrogacy, and the production of embryos for research or experimentation.

In regards to the use of *Otto per Mille* funds, members of the Synod learned that the most recent government figures indicate a 12 percent increase in the number of signatures for the Waldensian/Methodist Church. (The total number of signatures now stands at 470,000.) The Synod also took note of the fact that the Waldensian/Methodist Church will for the first time have access to a portion of the *Otto per Mille* funds of those persons who do not designate a preferred church or charity. This change means that next year, the *Tavola Valdese* will receive and need to manage an even larger amount of funds, perhaps as much as double the current amount. Given these developments, the Synod approved a "strategic plan" to guide the *Tavola* as it faces this new situation. One aspect of this plan concerns support for projects outside Italy and raises the percentage of funds for oversea projects from 30 to 50 percent of all sums received.

The Synod also initiated a discussion on new models of family. The discussion focused upon a document prepared by the Commission on Family, Marriage and de facto Couples. The document puts forward the position that all models of family are "equally significant," even those models whose members do not include father, mother and children. Moreover, the document asserts that new models of family cannot be on the margins of the prototypical model, or defined as a failure in comparison to the nuclear model consisting of father, mother and children. The document also asserts that because marriage is not a sacrament in the Protestant tradition, marriage is not an indispensable prerequisite for the establishment of a family. "There is no static and unchanging concept of marriage, nor an essential link between the family and marriage or between family and affiliation," the text says. **Rev. Paolo Ribet**, Chairperson of the Commission, noted in a press conference that "The reality of families in Italy has changed dramatically. As a church, we must ask ourselves what are today the models of family and how to respond to their needs. For these reasons, we also have to rethink our pastoral care for families." The document will be sent to the local churches for discussion and assessment.

This Synod also featured the election of a new Moderator of the *Tavola Valdese*. **Rev. Maria Bonafede**, the first woman ever elected to this office, completed her seven-year term of service. The choice of the Synod was **Rev. Eugenio Bernardini**. (See the interview with Rev. Bonafede and the text of Rev. Bernardini's address to the Synod following.) The Synod also elected members of *La Tavola*. New to the administrative board are **Rev. Luca Anziani** (Puglia, Basilicata) and **Rev. Jans Hansen** (Calabria). The Synod re-elected as members of *La Tavola* lay leaders **Ruggero Mica**, **Aldo Lausarot**, **Adriano Bertolini**, and **Daniela Manfrini**. Ms. Manfrini will serve as Vice-Moderator of *La Tavola*. The new Dean of the Waldensian Faculty of Theology in Rome is **Professor Yann Redalié**. **Ms. Alessandra Trotta** will continue her service as President of the Work of the Methodist Church in Italy (OPCEMI). The photo on cover is the new Tavola Valdese.

FIRST WALDENSIAN WOMAN TO MODERATE COMPLETES HER SEVENTH AND FINAL TERM—An Interview



Rev. Bonafede, what are the issues, concerns and hopes that have characterized the Synod this year?

The economic crisis in Italy and throughout Southern Europe is a major worry. It is affecting all of society, our church included. There is concern about the future, anxiety for the employment prospects of our young people, and insecurity even for those who currently have a job. A church is not a trade union or political party. It is not our role to identify which policies or strategies are the most appropriate to address and resolve in this difficult situation. However, as a church, we must acknowledge the idolatry that has been the illusion of limitless growth. We have to imagine and practice new ways of life. I am hopeful that our churches can do a great deal to address this topic.

The Synod also discussed other issues. Among these I would highlight the theme of new strategies for evangelization. Prose-lytism never has been our practice, but we must find ways to explain that the treasure of the Gospel—which has changed our lives—is not private property, an exclusive resource of our little tribe. On the contrary; we must always be on the look out for new ways to announce and share the Gospel with the people with whom we cross paths.

This Synod marks the end of your seven-year term as Moderator of La Tavola Valdese. You are the first woman to have held this office. What has been your experience?

The last seven years have been exceptionally intense, full of commitments, joy and—inevitably--concerns. I tried always to be myself: a pastor and woman who struggled to remain faithful to the vocation to which I was called. These years also have been difficult on a personal level. My mother experienced a serious illness and died. Despite these sorrows, I always found within the Tavola and the church in general, much love, respect and recognition. I felt fully recognized as the first woman to hold the position of Moderator, and not just by women - even if I found among women a particular sense of support and solidarity. I also have enjoyed ample recognition outside our church. It has been my privilege to start or consolidate many ecumenical, inter-religious, cultural and political relationships.

During the past seven years, I have experienced many changes within the Waldensian Church. For example, I think our members are much more aware of the reality of globalization and the resulting multicultural nature of our congregations, especially in the urban areas of Italy. Changes of this magnitude present us with both opportunities and challenges.

I have lived the crisis of some ecumenical relationships that at the beginning of my term seemed more promising. However, upon reflection, I acknowledge with joy that at the grassroots level of these organizations, persons are conducting many beautiful, significant experiments of dialogue and exploration.

The political pattern in Italy has changed noticeably during these seven years. I have watched with concern as the administrations that succeeded one another failed to address issues important to us. The most glaring example is the theme of religious freedom.

All in all, however, I can say that during these seven years, I always have received a great deal in terms of ideas, suggestions and solidarity-- in Italy, as well as abroad.



Moderator Eugenio Bernadini with Rev. Bonafede

In the midst of the current crisis, can the church offer a word of hope?

Scripture tells us that the night will not last forever and that Christians carry a precious gift of hope. Of course, as the Apostle Paul reminds us, we carry this treasure in earthen vessels. It is this hope that inspires us and directs us toward a new horizon of justice and peace. In short, we carry a word of confidence, on the one hand, and of commitment, on the other hand. We can be confident that the Lord will not forsake us, even when we choose wrong paths. At the same time, we must remain committed to searching for the right road, the one that the Lord will show us. We must be ready always to abandon wrong paths that we have chosen because of arrogance or ignorance. In the midst of the current crisis, which is not only economic, our watch words are conversion and change, a change that begins from within the individual lives of each of us.

MESSAGE FROM INCOMING MODERATOR BERNADINI CONTINUED. . .

Ephesians 4:1 will continue to orient me during my term as Moderator. We are experiencing a deep, widespread economic crisis. It will be prolonged. The crisis already has caused a reduction in our living standards and damped our prospects for the future. We have before us stark options. We can try to reconstruct past models, ones which have brought much economic well being but also exacted high costs - the degradation of the environment, for example. These models also have reinforced patterns of inequality and social injustice. Is there a second option? Can we try new, more sober patterns of life that emphasize quality more than quantity, equality more than that privilege?

We cannot but opt for the second option. As Italian Protestants, we have to support efforts for a different way of life, both at home and on the international stage. We have to face the fact that acceptance of new social models will require that each and everyone of us must be open to radical change in our understanding not only of ourselves, but also of the world in which we live.

Within this context, I want to emphasize the role that Protestant deacons can play. I raise this point not to boast, seek political recognition or obtain more funding. I wish only to note the fact that our diaconal involvement has expanded from traditional areas of service in which we cared only for our own to venues such as home health care; preventative, community care; assistance to immigrants and refugees; and locally-based program of support for young people. Obviously, we have limitations. We are all too well aware of them. However, with the support of the *otto per mille* program of the Waldensian Church, we must seek to be more effective in responding to the needs of the most vulnerable among us, those segments of society that are growing everywhere in our country. We also must not forget our diaconal responsibilities outside the borders of Italy and Europe. As the final verse of the Parable of the Good Samaritan reminds us, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). We are called to show mercy and be neighbor to everyone we encounter.

The economic crisis we are experiencing has undermined our identity as Europeans, and our identity in general. The crisis calls into question not only our present, but also our future. Elected leaders consider cultural and educational projects a luxury, an expense that we cannot afford. Given this trend, can we, as a minority, lessen our commitment in this area? I think not. Can we afford to assimilate to a culture that begrudgingly bestows the right of citizenship to immigrants, that refuses to acknowledge and integrate the various views and traditions of persons who inhabit our country legitimately? The words of Paul admonish us: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God" (Romans 12:2). Responding to the changing demographics of Italy requires courage, commitment, and resources. We must preserve an understanding of our historical and cultural heritage. We must pass this understanding on to our young people, that they may be prepared adequately to answer the question of what they want Europe to be tomorrow.

The biggest challenge to our cultural and theological identity is the encounter with brothers and sisters who have traveled to Italy from distant shores. Many of these persons are Protestants. The sharing of their stories and ours often is a difficult exercise in discovery, understanding and acceptance. Why make this effort? Why not choose to share the Gospel "separately" in Italy? I believe that we have come to embrace and to be embraced by the vision expressed in Ephesians 2:19. "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God." I believe that we have come to the conclusion that within a community of believers, the injunction of Galatians 6:2 obtains: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

Among the burdens we carry is the cultural baggage that each of us must acknowledge. Accommodating this baggage in a healthy way in the lives of our congregations will take time and assume different forms. The goal of inter-culturalism must be the same for everyone, but the paths to this destination will vary. Facing this challenge, we find comfort and hope in Scripture. "Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (I Corinthians 15:58).

Marta Bernardini, a leader of the Federation of Italian Protestant Youth (FGEI), recently brought to my attention a passage from the Gospel of Luke. A young Jesus is in the Temple in Jerusalem. "After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions (Luke 2:46). Marta pointed out that young people "are not empty vessels to be filled, but individuals who are wondering about their place in the world, young women and men full of questions, questions that they want to discuss with their church." I believe that these young people have not only questions, but also answers, a way of seeing reality that is different from the practices to which we have grown accustomed, a perspective that because of its novelty, is extremely important. We need new ways of seeing reality. We need the contribution of our youth, a contribution that already is a part of the fabric of our church life, but one that needs to expand. We must find ways to grow and learn together. Solidarity between generations requires that we prepare the next generation for leadership, a task in which each and every one of us must be involved.

Seven years ago, the Synod for the first time in history elected a woman, the **Rev. Maria Bonafede**, as Moderator. On that occasion, Rev. Bonafede noted the practical and symbolic import of choosing a member of "the other half of the church" as our repre-

sentative. This decision aroused interest and curiosity, especially outside our churches. Sadly, despite all claims to the contrary, gender equality is not yet a foregone conclusion, especially in religious communities. Doubts persist that a woman can fulfill a leadership role competently. The term of Rev. Bonafede as Moderator has proven once again that since our church recognized equal rights and duties to women and men (and therefore equal access to the duties and offices of governance), our church has become stronger, richer, and more whole. This blessing from the Lord is one that we will continue to celebrate. Let us give thanks to God, therefore, for our sister, Maria Bonafede. Let us recognize also the poise and courage with which she has borne the burdens of leadership, burdens onerous enough in themselves, but burdens made heavier because of assumptions and prejudices that a male counterpart would not have faced.

And so the Synod ends. Now begins the period of the post-Synod. The "extraordinary time" that we have had the grace to live in these days is ending. We return to the "ordinary time" of ministry, of mission, witness and service. Now again each of us is called to utilize, with confidence and hope, the gifts that God has given us. If we shirk this responsibility, all that we have said and promised during this Synod will be but empty words.

The Gospel reminds us, "The wind blows wherever it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). This verse is the one chosen by our evangelization team. The Spirit blows and makes possible positive change. The Spirit blows and throws open the closed doors and windows of our homes and churches. The Spirit blows and clarifies our conscience. The Spirit blows and breaks every chain that stifles not only our freedom and dignity, but also that of all the sons and daughters of God. May the Lord bless and keep us, this day and forever more.



Moderator Eugenio Bernardini, 58, is married and has three children. A graduate of the Waldensian Seminary in Rome (1981), he studied for a year at the Latin American Biblical Seminary in San Jose, Costa Rica. Ordained to the pastoral ministry in 1982, he has served congregations in Foggia and Orsara di Puglia, Torino, and Pinerolo. From 1996 to 2003, he served as Editor of the weekly newspaper, "Riforma." He also served as Vice Moderator of the Tavola Valdese from 2005 to 2010.

RECENT NEWS FROM THE →→→



FGEI was founded in 1969 as a result of the wish of Waldensian, Methodist and Baptist youth movements to get together in a common interdenominational federation. Nowadays FGEI is a network which keeps youth groups from Baptist, Methodist and Waldensian congregations in touch with one another. Its members acknowledge their faith in Jesus Christ through their commitment in everyday life, their own personal experience and the joy of meeting up. Whoever may wish to share one's questions, doubts or hopes would be welcome. Youth of FGEI often organize local and national meetings and training camps. They also discuss the present political situation and reflect upon the motives of the members of the community by participating in the activities of the Church in many different aspects. **Claudio Paravati** has served as General Secretary of the Federation of Italian Protestant Youth (FGEI) since June 2011. Prior to assuming office, he was a member of the FGEI Board for two years. He has agreed to share the latest happenings at FGEI with us.

Can you tell our readers about the evolution of FGEI activities during the past years?

During the last years, we have seen a growth in collaboration among the various groups that are part of FGEI. The activity has included meetings and exchanges that have strengthened the dialogue within FGEI. In the past there too often was fragmentation within FGEI because of a lack of dialogue between the groups. It's also true that the number of young people who attend Protestant churches in Italy has declined. In many cases the groups are very small and unaware of the possibilities that FGEI offers. This is why it has been necessary to work incessantly with pastors, congregations, and judicatory bodies. Another important development has been the greater degree of collaboration with the governing bodies of the churches. FGEI involves the Baptist, Methodist and Waldensian churches. As a result of this stronger relationship, the churches always are aware of the activities that FGEI is promoting. I emphasize this point because in the past (I mean the distant past) the FGEI was seen and sometimes understood itself as something separate from the church.

Can you say more about the connection between FGEI and the current ministry of the churches?

With the new vision that the Being Church Together Program has put forward, I think that it is ever more obvious that the work of FGEI had to be in close contact with local congregations. In fact, there are many communities that consist of a high percentage of immigrants. Unfortunately, these persons sometimes don't know how to interact with their own pastor because of a language and cultural differences. Recognizing these problems, we decided to organize youth camps in these communities as a way to bring

FGEI (Federation of Italian Protestant Youth) NEWS Continued...

together different cultural worlds and promote dialogue. The results were so positive that not only local congregations but also the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI) became aware of the value of these projects. However, let me be clear about one thing. The FGEI does not intend or want to eliminate differences or to promote homogenization. Our hope is to be able to accept and hold together differences. That is the real spirit of our churches. I want to underline this aspect because it is not always the case that a church has this kind of vision. So we are called constantly to find ways to talk about and understand our differences. Such work is necessary in order to build an intercultural community. Everyone has his or her own cultural references. What we need to do is accept each other and share our own cultural models in a way that is understandable and inclusive for persons from a different background. In this sense, the camps are very important because they create the opportunity for all the participants to spend time together and to get to know one another. We believe that the recognition of each other is possible only through such closeness. Of course, implementing this vision involved a great deal of work, especially if you consider the fact that we organized four camps in a short period of time and that each camp involved about 50 participants.

The Synod recently confirmed its support for the work of FGEI. I understand that you are planning a youth exchange with El Río de La Plata. Can you say more?

I am pleased that the Synod has supported our initiatives and expressed appreciation for the way we are working. Such feedback helps us understand whether or not we're doing our job. With recognition, however, comes responsibility. We have to redouble our efforts on the Río de La Plata exchange and other projects.

Unfortunately, as we all know, resources are limited. All of us who believe in FGEI and live in Italian society understand that we are placing unfair demands on young people who too often experience precarious or demeaning employment situations and too often are obligated by economic necessity to abandon their dreams. I felt it important to emphasize this point during the Synod forum that the Honorable **Minister Andrea Ricciardi** attended. As young people, we would like the Italian government to help us envision the future. Will we be able to find a livelihood and remain in Italy? Will we be forced to emigrate, as were many of our ancestors? Is it futile to aspire for a sense of community and work for the common good? In asking these questions, we Italian young people are united with brothers and sisters our age who come from abroad and constitute the so called "second generation" of immigrants. Our priority as FGEI is to build a community that values the rights of every individual and that finds way to create meaningful employment opportunities for young people.



How important is the support of the church to the activities of FGEI?

The support of churches and of organizations related to our churches is essential. Given the fast-paced, globalized world in which we live, the challenge before us is not only to manage existing programs intelligently, but also to broaden our horizons, to seek for inspiration. Personally, I found it extremely important to have the opportunity to participate in a meeting of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) that took place in Atlanta a few years ago. The FGEI was invited to send a representative. My participation was possible thanks to a scholarship from the American Waldensian Society. This experience was important to me because I had the opportunity to see the re-emergence of a part of the world-wide student movement. The time I spent in Atlanta was exciting and enriching. Many of the topics being discussed by students and young adults in the United States were issues also of importance to FGEI. The different perspective with which U.S. brothers and sisters approached these topics helped me see more clearly the challenges facing FGEI. Upon my return to Italy, I was able to share these insights with my friends and co-workers. My experience at the WSCF conference in Atlanta, together with the exchange project that we will have next year with young people from El Río de la Plata (also an initiative that AWS is helping to fund with a \$5000 grant) have enabled me to redefine what it means today to be a Christian and a young person passionate about the mission of the church.

What are the next steps in the work of FGEI?

During the next month, we plan to host young adult camps that will focus on important political issues. For example, what does it mean today to believe in and work for the "common good"? We hope that a successful outcome to the camps will confirm the fact that FGEI is beginning a new, exciting period of activity and reflection.

Next year, we will hold our national meeting (the *Congresso FGEI*). The goal of this event always is to bring together Protestant young adults interested in and passionate about "reform" of the church. As Protestants, however, we believe that each of us is a living piece of the church. "Reform" will not be possible without addressing the issues of intercultural congregations, youth ministry, and international, ecumenical relationships. As young people, we see ourselves and our churches more and more as but a part of a universal church. We hope to do our part in, to assume our responsibility for, making this vision a reality.

UPCOMING YOUTH EXCHANGE PROJECT

Building upon past work together, three organizations in Europe--the CASD (District Coordinator of Scout Activities), the FGEL (Italian Federation of Protestant Youth) and the Italian Committee of CEVAA (Evangelical Community of Apostolic Action) envisioned an exchange program between youth/young adult members of the Waldensian, Methodist, Baptist Churches in Italy and their youth/ young adult counterparts in the Coordinator of Youth Activities (CAJ) of the Waldensian Church in El Río de La Plata (Uruguay/Argentina).

The program foresees that between January and February 2013, 15 young persons from the Iglesia Valdense del Río de la Plata (accompanied by three chaperones) will travel to Italy. A visit to El Río de La Plata by a comparable group of young Italians and chaperones is foreseen for August 2013. Each visit will last approximately one month. Funding from various organizations related to the Waldensian Church, including the American Waldensian Society, will help to defray travel costs and other expenses.

The project seeks to provide opportunity for face-to-face dialogue that promotes mutual understanding, the building of friendships, and the growth on a personal level of appreciation for and commitment to a shared faith. More specifically, the project invites youth and young adults from different contexts to talk with each other about ways in which, starting from situations of crisis familiar to them, young people envision hope and imagine the possibility of a more just world. We asked **Rev. Stefano D'Amore**, Associate Pastor of the Waldensian congregation in Torino and one of the proponents of this exchange, to explain the project in more detail.

Rev. D'Amore, from where does the idea of this exchange project between young people come?

The idea comes from initiatives of the CASD (District Coordinator of Scout Activities) in 2004 and 2009. The CASD is not a formal member of the Waldensian Church, but CASD seeks to help young people appreciate nature. CASD offers a variety of activities appropriate for the age range between childhood and young adulthood (about 25 years of age). During the past two years, CASD has been in conversation with the CAJ (Coordinator of Activities Juveniles) in El Río de la Plata to set up this exchange. Much of the work has focused on logistics and fundraising—important aspects of the project we envision. We hope to organize a bilateral exchange. We want there to be a group of Italians who go to El Río de la Plata and a group from El Río de la Plata who come to Italy. Although past initiatives had some good ideas, the first exchanges had the limitation of being too narrow in scope. We hope this time to broaden the conversation to include reflection on the economic, political, and social forces that impinge on the environment in which we live.



Stefano D'Amore

What has changed with the second exchange in 2009?

Already during the second exchange in 2009, collaboration with the CEVAA made a difference, especially in terms of the practical organization of the program and in terms of deciding what we asked participants to see and experience. The decisive factor was bringing together representatives of the young people and talking with them about their reasons for participating in the exchange. What emerged was that for participants from El Río de la Plata, faith was a very important factor. Faith was less important for the Italians, because the Italian group was composed largely of people who did not attend church regularly. The CEVAA helped us appreciate and evaluate these differences. The FGEL has been instrumental in helping us think through the logistical implications of these differences and how we can design a project that welcomes all participants.

What was the process that led to a reorganization of the project?

Shortly after consideration of the points I've mentioned, the congress of FGEL met at Agape in June 2011. Member of the congress voted to revive the exchange, but on a new basis. CASD followed a similar process during its National Assembly, as did the National Committee of CEVAA. As a result of these developments, FGEL appointed **Aline Pons, Giuseppe Cinniti, Cecile Sappè** and me to a committee with responsibility for rethinking the purpose of the exchange. Our committee is called "Scambia Mente" (Change Your Mindset). Our first step was to ask for the support of the *Tavola Valdese* in Italy and the *Mesa Valdese* in *El Río de La Plata*. By requesting the involvement of the two administrative boards of the church, we hoped to expand participation in this project within the Baptist, Methodist and Waldensian churches in Italy. In fact, discussion of and interest in the soon spread beyond the borders of the Waldensian Valleys. From our point of view, this development was a major step forward. Our committee met several times during this year, constantly remaining in dialogue with the *Tavola*, the *Mesa* and the CAJ.

UPCOMING YOUTH EXCHANGE PROJECT Continued. . .

What are the main changes that have resulted from this new organizational structure?

One example is the selection of participants. Relying on the fact that the Synod has voted both in 2011 and 2012 to increase youth exchanges between Italy and El Río de La Plata, we wanted to ask potential participants for a greater commitment. We did not want them to be motivated primarily by the desire to travel abroad. We wanted also to reach out to all the congregations in Italy in order to identify and recruit the most motivated young people. Our process has been to ask Italian youth interested in the exchange to attend preliminary planning meetings, to volunteer to host delegates from El Río de La Plata, and to develop reflections on themes of shared interest between Europe and South America. The economic crisis is a good example of such a theme.

Allow me to offer one other example. Since all of us in "Scambia Mente" already had enjoyed the opportunity to spend time in El Río de la Plata, we wanted to identify and recruit motivated, young leaders who never had visited Argentina or Uruguay. In pastoral candidate **Marco Forner** one and FGEI members **Paola Pasquino** and **Deborah** Grill, both engaged in the Waldensian congregation of Prali, we have found such leaders. The progress we have made would have been unthinkable without the support of the CEVAA and AWS. At the same time, we are proud of the fact that we, organizers of the upcoming exchange, have insisted on contributing our share of the funding, thus maintaining a sense of responsibility for ourselves.

How will the planning team work during the coming months?

As I said before, it was necessary to listen attentively to the motivation of potential participants. The planned preliminary meetings will help us in this regard. We will be able to understand better how to work as a group, assuage initial fears, and address any misconceptions about the context in which our brothers and sisters live in El Río de la Plata. We hope that these meetings also will enable us to identify new ways of introducing ourselves to one another. For example, we are thinking of creating a blog in which each participant in the exchange can introduce him or herself.

In February 2013, the first portion of the exchange will take place. The group from El Río de la Plata will come to Italy for four weeks. The group will spend one week in the Waldensian Valleys and a week in Rome and surrounding areas. While in Rome, our guests will participate in a camp with the 15 Italian participants who will travel to El Río de La Plata. The following week, our guests will divide themselves into small groups in order to explore three themes more thoroughly--Deaconship, "Being Church Together," and Youth/Young Adult Ministry. The final week of the visit will return us to the Valleys, where we will observe together the February 17th Celebration.

The last preparatory meeting for the current exchange project will take place in Spring 2013. We will discuss not only group dynamics, but also more technical issues. The journey of the Italians to El Río de La Plata will take place in August. We want to sure that the Italian delegation returns to Italy in time for the opening of the synod meetings in Torre Pellice.

What do you think is the impact of this exchange project on persons who choose to become involved in it?

My first thought is that the participants in the exchange from El Río de la Plata never before have been to Italy. For them, Italy is the country from which their families originated. Italy, therefore, is a polyvalent, often ambivalent symbol. Very often the Italian families that immigrated to El Río de la Plata were escaping grinding poverty and seeking a better life. At the same time, the experience of immigration uprooted them from a familiar, structured church life, as well as from a particular way of understanding and living the Christian faith. Precisely for these reasons, it is important for us to enlist the help of organizations in the Waldensian Valleys such as the "Il Barba" program of the Waldensian Cultural Center in Torre Pellice. We need literally to walk together the path of pilgrimage to the places that forged Waldensian faith. We need to experience together a shared history and identity.



What are other important aspects of the stay in Italy by participants in the exchange program?

In addition to the time that we spend in the Waldensian Valleys, other weeks of the exchange program will play a key part of the project. We hope to introduce our guests from El Río de La Plata to the reality of life in the current Italian church. Participants from El Río de la Plata will have the opportunity to experience a reality that is fluid, constantly changing. For example, our guests will visit congregations in Bologna and Modena, characterized by a strong presence of immigrants from Ghana, as well as congregations in Torino and Milano, each and all very different from the historic congregations of the Waldensian Valleys. We look forward also to introducing our guests to congregations in central and southern Italy that survive thanks to collaboration between Waldensians, Methodists, and Baptists. This ecumenical practice is for us an essential feature of what it means to be church together.

WEBSITE INFORMS OF HISTORIC WALDENSIAN SITES



Daniel Gardiol is an astronomer at the Astronomical Observatory of Torino, a job he has held for 12 years. A Waldensian, he also cares passionately about Waldensian history. Wanting to combine these two interests, and possessing the computer skills that his scientific work requires, he created a web site about the Waldensian Valleys. It was 1998, a time when there was only one other web site (that of the Waldensian Church of Torino) that featured information about the Valleys.

Can you tell to our readers how you began your work on www.valdesi.org?

At the time we began this adventure, the internet in Italy was still in its infancy. Not many people paid attention to the issues that interested us. Our idea was to use the internet as a tool to allow anyone to take a tour of the historic Waldensian sites. Our goal was to make widely available images of places that were central to Waldensian history. At first our abilities were limited, but as more sophisticated technology has become available, we have been pleased with the way in which our web site has evolved.

What are the main characteristics of the website?

Although aspects of the web site have changed over time, a consistent goal of ours has been to present visitors with a dynamic experience. The idea is not only to add new material on a regular basis, but also to ensure that the content of the site offers a coherent vision of Waldensian history. Accordingly, we have chosen to include on the website not only places located in the Valleys, but to follow the footsteps of our history and include places where the Waldensians had a role. Here's an example. In addition to pictures and explanations of sites such as the *Chiesa della tana* or the monument of Sibaud, we have sought to make connection with places like the main square of Torino, where many of our ancestors were burned at the stake.



Can you tell us about your efforts to reach a larger audience?

Our hope always has been to make the site available to everyone. We have tried to translate the content of the site into other languages--English, French, German. However, the dynamic characteristic of the site has made timely and accurate translation of new material a challenge. Things would be easier if we had opted for a more static format. In addition, you have to keep in mind that oversight of this project is the responsibility of the Committee for Historic Waldensian Sites. Appointed by the *Tavola Valdese*, this Committee has the task of preserving and promoting Waldensian heritage. Unfortunately, the Committee has very limited resources. My work and that of the persons who collaborate with me is mostly voluntary, except for a small amount of *otto per mille* funds. There was a person who was helping us translate the content of the site into English, but she, too, was a volunteer and could only attend to the site in her spare time. Given these conditions, we decided to discontinue our plans for translation of the site's content. We simply could not keep pace with the frequent updates in Italian. As I've already said, our primary goal is to maintain an open, fluid structure for the site, so we constantly are at work to update content and find new ways of connecting with persons who visit the site.

Do you consider the web site a sort of encyclopedia of historic Waldensian sites?

My hope is that visitors can access and use the site at various levels. The "lowest" tier consists of single pages that give information about a specific place, a particular event, or a unique individual. These pages are linked to a "higher" tier that allows visitors to undertake virtual tours of places associated with broader events in Waldensian history--the Glorious Return of 1689, for example. In addition to these geographical excursions, there are also artistic tours that explain and place in their historic context the work of Waldensian artists such as **Paolo Paschetto** and **Marco Rostan**. The site's home page allows visitors to access all of this content at whichever level they prefer.

Beside photographs and written content, are you trying to develop additional features for the website?

We have tried over the years to incorporate audiovisual materials. Unfortunately, we face financial restraints in this area, The production of video materials is very expensive. We have addressed this problem by cataloging and placing on the site video material that others have produced. More recently, with the help of *otto per mille* funds, the Committee has been able to produce and post some brief video clips. We also have collaborated with Radio Beckwith in translating and providing subtitles for a video produced by the churches of El Río de la Plata. Obviously we would like to do the same in English, and the English language translation of the Italian website is one of our main goals for the future. We receive many requests from the United States for translation of the material on our site. We understand that with adequate and timely translation, the site couldn't be a very useful tool for persons who have origins in the Waldensian Valleys but have never had the opportunity to visit them in person.

What ideas do you have for the future?

We would like to collaborate with friends in the United States and in El Río de la Plata in order to make their stories available on the site. Our goal is to be of help in making these precious parts of Waldensian history more widely known. The site www.valdesi.org wants to be a site with content written and shared by those most directly involved in Waldensian history. We hope also to take the steps necessary for a transition of the site to Web 2.0 and thus be able to establish a presence in the various social networks.



TRIFECTA DELEGATION TO SOUTH AMERICA

I am **Rev. Jonathan Evans**, Associate Pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Naples and twelve years ago, I started a year that changed my life – how I see myself, the world, and following Jesus. I was a mission volunteer in Buenos Aires, Argentina, working with street kids. This occurred through a partnership between the Presbyterian Church (USA) and local South American churches, such as the Lutheran and Waldensian Churches.

Just a few months ago, I was blessed with the opportunity to visit once again. But this time I was not going as a mission volunteer but as a delegate for the American Waldensian Society. The delegation consisted of myself, **Rev. Francis Rivers**, Executive Director, and **Rev. Dr. Kevin Frederick**, pastor of the Waldensian Presbyterian Church in Valdese, NC. Together we travelled to the southern hemisphere to connect with Waldensian churches and ministries in South America and **Dennis Smith** (PCUSA Regional Liaison, Brazil and Southern Cone, World Mission). Fortunately, I also had a chance to visit some friends and ministries with which I was already well acquainted.

My first stop was Buenos Aires. There, I met a wonderful clergy couple. We shared thoughts on ministerial challenges that we have in common, such as the decline of the institutional church, what it means to worship in changing contexts, and parallels between an immigrant church and the mainline church in the U.S.

The next morning, I visited some old friends of mine, Swiss Methodist missionaries who have worked with orphans and troubled children for decades and are now finishing their life's work in La Lechería, a place that helps educate children and youth in a poor barrio (neighborhood).

Continued opposite, p. 11 → →

“Environmentally Friendly Church” WALDENSIAN CHURCH OF MILAN OBTAINS ITALY’S FIRST CERTIFICATION

MILAN – Even churches consume and pollute. And if they commit to making their carbon footprint lighter, even churches can obtain environmental certification. Milan’s Waldensian Temple is the first church in Italy to have met the standards and received “Green Rooster” certification, which is the ISO 14001 standard specifically designed for places of worship.

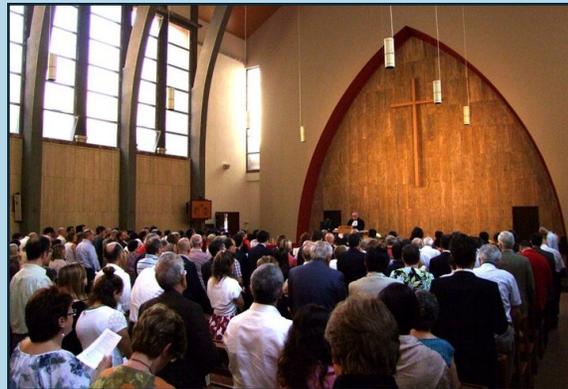
CERTIFICATION – The road to this important certification was long, but after 5 years there was great exultation in via Francesco Sforza. In 2007, Milan’s Waldensian community of just under 1,000 members decided to interpret a passage from the book of Genesis more seriously. Genesis 2:15 reads “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” To translate this concept into modern terms: take care of the environment. So, this small community decided to start, but from where? From theology. In a general church assembly, they approved and wrote up a series of guidelines that take cues from faith and work on ecology. The second step was to raise awareness among church members. An eight-person environmental committee was constituted. This group led the way by identifying collective and individual behavioral changes that would lead to a more environmentally friendly church. Step by step, changes were implemented.

BEHAVIOR – How many cars were used to get to regular Sunday services? Too many. What was the solution? Car pooling for elderly church-goers and those coming from afar; public transportation for others. The next step was eliminating plastic. So that meant no more disposable items and a return to real plates and glasses at their community meals after church services. Other steps included installing energy efficient lighting in the temple, using recycled paper for photocopies and reusing rather than discarding various types of materials, as well as creating their own Ethical Purchasing Group in order to promote buying local and short supply chain products. Lastly, they gathered data needed to calculate the community’s overall energy consumption. This information was delivered to the certifying organization and yesterday the church was notified that they had been awarded certification.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENT - The “Green Rooster” program began in Germany. There are currently 400 German churches, both Protestant and Catholic, which have obtained this certification of sustainability. There are nearly 100 more in Austria, France and Belarus. Italian churches had not yet obtained this certification. “We are actually just at the beginning [of this process],” said environmental committee member Laura Baldassini. “In our view, this certification is a goal but also a commitment made by our entire community to continue reducing our eco-footprint. We hope that our example might provide an impetus for other religious communities.”

Marta Ghezzi **October 6, 2012**
12:29 ©COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

Translated from the original Italian article in the online edition of *Corriere della Sera* newspaper. Downloaded Sunday October 7, 2012.



SOUTH AMERICA DELEGATION REPORT Continued. . .

I visited it again and was touched by the continued need and the wonderful work being done at La Lechería.



After that visit, I went to the remote northern province of Chaco with Francis, Kevin and Dennis Smith. In Chaco, we visited the Toba people. They are largely hunters and gatherers struggling for their land. The communities we visited are Christian and seek out ecumenical partnerships.

←← Toba woman constructing a basket

Seeing this part of Argentina, touched me on several levels. One, while sadly not surprising that an indigenous population is under grave threat from local and international interests, I was pleasantly taken aback by them. For the Toba that I met, to be Christian meant not to work for the large industrial agricultural companies, but to struggle for land alongside your people. I first learned of this when meeting a young man named Auden, whose life story in working for the local cotton company as a teenager parallels that of the prodigal son. He felt dehumanized before turning to the resurgence of human rights among indigenous (or “originary” peoples). He writes, in a book that he co-authored, that his studies through the seminary [sponsored in part by the Waldensians] open paths and possibilities in his struggle for rights and territory. Current Toba seminary students pictured below at I.S.E.D.E.T (seminary). ↓



On another level, I was struck by the appearance of the Toba people, both in their physical characteristics and their housing conditions. They are startlingly similar to many of the street children that I used to work with in Buenos Aires. This suggests to me that many of the hordes of people living in slums in Buenos Aires came from places like Chaco and could have been people like Auden, but not fortunate enough to stay on their land. This further suggests to me the importance of standing alongside the Toba people in their struggles for the land.

Pictured here: Myself, Francis Rivers, **Alba Rostan** (Director of JUM, “United Missions Group”), and Dennis Smith. ↓

After the visit to Chaco, we headed straight to Uruguay to meet with **Dario Barolin**, who is a Waldensian pastor, professor of Old Testament, and a leader in the Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed churches of Latin America; **Jorge Roland**, a lay leader in the Waldensian Church; and **Rachel Malan**, Director of the Centro Emmanuel, a Waldensian agricultural retreat center bearing witness to environmental stewardship. They all impressed me as highly competent, committed, and collegial in their respective ministries. We discussed many possibilities for possible collaboration and I look forward to seeing how these conversations take shape in the coming years.

Overall, the trip to South America is a nice next step in forming relationships among Waldensians there, Waldensians in the US, and others such as the Presbyterian Church (USA) who have interests in ministries in Argentina and Uruguay. If you would like to find out more about my trip or about the ministries we visited, please feel free to contact me any time via email, rev.jonathan.evans@gmail.com.



Follow-up: The delegation resulted in some interesting ideas and exchange possibilities from the Waldensian church and its ministries. As a result, next September, representatives from La Tavola Valdese (Italy) and La Mesa Valdese (Uruguay/Argentina); the Europe and South America Area Secretaries of the international, ecumenical partners of the Waldensian Church [i.e. The Reformed Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the United Church of Christ/The Christian Church/Disciples of Christ]; and members and friends of the American Waldensian Society have all been invited to Valdese, NC. We will convene with the purpose of identifying goals and strategies upon which to collaborate during the next 3 – 5 years. If you are interested in helping monetarily sponsor this event, please send a donation tagged ‘2013 Event’ to the Society office or via Paypal using the office’s email address

Rev. Eliana Briante Leads 2012 Synod Procession



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