

Colonia San Gustavo, the original settlement in Entre Rios, Argentina



## THE SOCIETY'S MISSION AND COMMITMENT ARE THREE-FOLD:

### 1. TO TELL THE STORY

The Waldensians are a people of faith and courage not only in history, but in contemporary society. Their caring presence is a strong witness to the love of Jesus Christ in the world. We seek to share this powerful witness with others, believing that the Waldensian story is an inspirational one for believers everywhere.

### 2. TO ENCOURAGE CROSSINGS

Much can be learned from our sisters and brothers in Italy and Latin America. We seek to encourage and facilitate relationships between individuals, judicatory bodies, seminaries and church-related organizations in order to increase mutual understanding, cooperation and support.

### 3. TO PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUPPORT

We seek funding that assists the ministry initiatives of the Waldensian Church.

**Founded in 1906 in New York City, the Society is a national membership organization made up of individuals and congregations across many denominations. Today the Society is based in Valdese, North Carolina, a town rich in Waldensian history and heritage. The Society regularly communicates with its constituency the activities with its partners in Italy, Uruguay and Argentina.**

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# AMERICAN WALDENSIAN SOCIETY



Sharing a story of Christian faith and courage that spans more than eight centuries

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## IN SOUTH AMERICA

Waldensian presence in South America was born out of the mid-nineteenth century emigration from Italy. The church, with offices in Colonia Valdense, Uruguay, includes 24 congregations and 20 specialized ministries that address the needs of persons on the fringes of society.

A TRADITION OF FAITH  
through the generations.

## THE WALDENSIANS

The Waldensian Church is rooted in the preaching of Valdesius, a merchant in Lyon, France, who lived during the same period of the late Middle Ages as Francis of Assisi. Like Francis, Valdesius believed in the value of the evangelical poverty of the early church. The community of faith that gathered around Valdesius survived three centuries of persecution and adhered to the Calvinist branch of the Protestant Reformation in 1532. Waldensians gained their civil rights in 1848. The Constitution of the Italian Republic granted the Waldensian Church freedom of worship in 1948, but the rights were not signed into law until 1984.

The Waldensian Church is governed by a single Synod (*photo below*) that gathers in two sessions: a European session that is held at the end of August in Torre Pellice (an hour from Turin, in the heart of the Waldensian Valleys), and a South American session that takes place in El Río de La Plata at the beginning of February. The Synod elects the two moderators of the Waldensian boards—the Tavola Valdese in Italy and the Mesa Valdense in Argentina-Uruguay.

Over centuries of persecution, the solidarity received from Protestant churches abroad was enormously important to the Waldensians. Accordingly, the Church has a strong international, ecumenical vocation. The Waldensian Church is a member of the World Council of Churches, World Communion of Reformed Churches and Conference of European Churches. The Methodist component is a member of the World Methodist Council, as well as the Conference of European Churches. The relationships between the Waldensian Church and the Protestant churches of the USA are strong, especially with the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, the United Methodist Church, and the United Church of Christ.



The Waldensian Church today embraces approximately 30,000 members in Italy and 15,000 in Argentina-Uruguay. In Italy there are over 150 congregations and as many specialized ministries and social programs. The communities are distributed throughout Italy, from Sicily to the Piedmont. The social ministry of the church always has been non-confessional and open to all, regardless of faith or creed. In addition to increasing its membership, the Church is dedicated to communicating the message, based on the Gospels, that believers are “set free by Christ for personal and public responsibility.” The Church often pursues this program by taking clear, progressive, even controversial stands on issues in public life related to the struggle for a state free of clerical and sectarian interests.

### ACROSS THE CONTINENTS, THE WALDENSIAN WITNESS TODAY INCLUDES:

- ✓ Evangelism and New Church Development
- ✓ Integration of Third World Protestant refugees and immigrants in Italy into new or existing Waldensian congregations, a new program called *Being Church Together*
- ✓ Advocacy for decent treatment of immigrants
- ✓ Expanded presence in the culture through “Diaconal” (caring) ministries
- ✓ Increased solidarity with suffering peoples and sister churches in South America, Africa and the former Eastern Europe
- ✓ Actively working with other Christians through various ecumenical groups
- ✓ Commitment to Interfaith Initiatives

Rev. Elymas Newell, pastor in Mezzano, Parma with Rev. Maria Bonafede, Moderator of Tavola Valdese at the 2009 International Convention of Being Church Together Congregations.



LUX LUCET IN TENEBRIS - Jesus is the Light which Shines in the Darkness, *John 1:5*.

The seven stars which circle the light reference the vision of *Revelation 1:16*, where Christ in glory holds seven stars in his hand which represent the seven churches in Asia, in crisis, due to persecution. Through these two Biblical references, Waldensians affirm their commitment to be faithful to the Gospel and their desire to be in communion with Christ.