

RICHARD AND PINUCCIA WILSON

SERVING IN TRENTO, ITALY

With Stefania, Daniele, Luca and Mattia

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You have no doubt heard about the situation in Italy, whilst starting to consider the effects of the coronavirus in your own country. I have been sending out regular updates on Facebook as the crisis has been unfolding here, because with daily changes and challenges a newsletter was not appropriate. But I thought that this was a good moment to write a summary of what has happened so far for those who do not follow me on Facebook. I will keep writing updates every 1 to 3 days, so if you want up to date information to pray for us, you will need to make me a friend request on Facebook.

Things are bad in Italy, especially in Lombardy. Not only are hospitals overwhelmed (resulting in 8% of all cases being health workers), but so are funeral parlours. Even though all funerals are banned, the coffins can not be buried or burnt fast enough, so in some places there are queues of coffins. The wait for being cremated was a week, although the army has just transported the excess coffins to other regions of the country to be cremated elsewhere.

In other areas, like our province (that is adjacent to Lombardy), the epidemic is not as strong. This does not mean that we have been hit less, only that we were hit later, and in a few days or a few weeks (if nothing is done) the rest of Italy will be like Lombardy. And so will your country.

There have been various restrictions put into place in Italy since February 24, with the lockdown arriving on March 9. Too late. If it had been imposed earlier, hundreds of lives would have been saved. I don't know if it was because the government did not realise how serious the situation would become, or that it did not have the political capacity to

impose drastic restrictions when the country was at the beginning of the exponential curve. But given that other countries are waiting to impose a lockdown that is evidently inevitable, I think it is the latter. One of the saddest aspects of Italy's situation is that people are dying here without other countries learning the lesson.

Our lockdown means that everyone has to stay at home, except to buy groceries, go to work, or for health reasons. And a lot do not go to work, as many work at home instead of in offices, all shops except supermarkets, pharmacies, and a few other essential types are closed, as are many factories.

In the Family

We are coping well with being all stuck at home. Stefania and Daniele get their school work sent to them, that they can mostly manage by themselves, with a bit of help from us. Luca and Mattia require more attention, as we try to create different activities each day for our home pre-schooling. I have been trying to do my work for the mission, in the church (coming up with new ways to do church), and on the computer. I am managing at least to keep up with the urgent and regular jobs; working on my longer term ideas is more difficult.

What has saved us however is the fact that Pinuccia's parents were visiting us when the lockdown started, and can not go back home to Sicily. But rather than having the burden of two extra people in the house, we have the privilege of two full-time helpers, who look after a lot of the housework. It is as though we have 4 people in the house rather than 8.

In the Church

Two Sundays ago, the church service had to be cancelled an hour before it was due to happen. This called for a rapidly organised service broadcast on YouTube. Last Sunday we were able to do a better job, with material for the children as well, although the restrictions on leaving the house meant some of it had to be pre-recorded. The weekly Bible studies, the youth group, and the church prayer meeting (was monthly, now is weekly) are also meeting on Internet. We are still working on improving this ministry, but what has been very noticeable is the increased attendance. Instead of 50 families/singles attending church, more than 100 watched it on YouTube, with another 100 viewings during the week. Usually there are 6-8 people at the Bible study I lead; last night there were 16 on 11 screens. 25 for the prayer meeting is more than usual as well. This is partly because, for the evening meetings, both parents of small children can attend, as can those who live far away. But there is also, I believe, more interest in praying together, and people are inviting friends who would never come to the church hall to watch the service on Internet.

Yesterday we received a shock, as one of the church members (an almost 50 year old lady), after more than a week of fever, has been diagnosed with the coronavirus. We suppose her husband and two daughters in their early 20s are at risk as well. This is a new challenge for the church, especially as no one can leave home to help them. But everything is a

Prayer and thanksgiving points

- For Italy.
- For the family - after having trouble coping with the frenetic nature of modern family life, that we would use well this enforced time together without outside commitments.
- For the church, adapting to ministry in a new situation.
- For us, Italy, and the world after coronavirus, that we would not forget our fragility, and dependency on and need for God.

new challenge for the church and for the Christians in this period.

On the Computer

Although there are too many interruptions and distractions to be able to work much on my site and programs, they are still out there being used. In fact, on March 9th (the first day of lockdown) there was a sudden increase of visits to my site of 30%, an increase that has been maintained since then. The most read chapters of the Bible on my site are Psalm 90 and Matthew 24. It is partly caused by people being at home more now, but also by more spiritual interest.

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