

In the church

Everything is up and running again at church after the summer break. This means that we are busy with our part of the church life. But before mentioning some of the highlights from these activities, I will write about something else that has struck me in the church in the last few weeks – the things that we are not directly involved in. In the past few weeks, a number of "extra" ministries have presented themselves after the church services. One of these was *Altrimenti*, a social-cultural association that the church has been working with for a couple of years. It has now become a legal association, and will soon be an official charity as well. Things that the church has done in the society in the past, such as public conferences, and some of the things that individuals have been doing, like organizing collections of second hand clothes to send to other countries, or working in nursing homes, will be brought under the name of this association. It also has an aim of promoting new initiatives in the church. This means that the congregation will be more involved in the life of our province, and that such initiatives will be more directed and organised.

Another group was that of the university. Officially it is a group of the *Gruppi Biblici Universitari* (IFES) movement. However all the leaders belong to our church, so in many ways it is a ministry of our church at the university. They have good evangelistic Bible studies, being outnumbered by the non-Christian friends who attend. Often the leaders try to wrap up the meeting because it is getting late, but it is the friends who want to keep the long Bible discussions going. This is certainly very different from when I was working with the university students. I was happy to have just one student to meet with. I was encouraged though last week to hear from one such student who had become a Christian, but who I had not heard from for many years. He is now a lawyer in Portugal, and still going strong.

A ministry which has been growing in the church lately is that for mothers. Working as a part of the Italian branch of *Moms in Touch*,

they pray for their children and for their schools. There are three such groups now going in the church, and they have been good as a means of outreach as well, contacting other mothers who are not part of the church.

All this is a sign of growth in the church, not just numerically but also in maturity, as there are a lot of people involved in ministry outside of the "official" ministries of the church, although they are of course supported and helped by the church.

I mentioned previously the arrival of Suzanne Bikker, a new missionary from ECM Holland. This has changed my role a bit, as she meets with Pinuccia and me once a week to talk about life and ministry, and we try to help each other in that. She has had a positive effect on the group at Rovereto, where she lives and where her main ministry will be. Having someone actually living there makes a big difference, as she has been able to regularly spend time with the people from the church in



Stefania dressed for her fourth birthday party.

Richard and Pinuccia Wilson
via Zippel, 5
38015 Lavis TN, Italy
Phone: 0461240992
richard@laparola.net
<http://richardwilson.interfree.it/>
Blog: <http://richard.laparola.net/>

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**European Christian Mission
P.O. Box 15
Croydon NSW 2132
(02) 97475446
ecmoz@ecmi.org**



the city. So for example a couple, who have never come to the Bible study despite being invited many times over the past two years, suddenly started coming. Not only that, but we meet in their house now. Then a new person unexpectedly appeared. She had been studying at Bologna (where she was very active in the GBU, so I had heard about her), but has now moved back to her parents' house at Rovereto. She is a bundle of energy and ideas committed to God, and will be a great help to Suzanne in starting things there. Suzanne however will be going back to Holland now for three months to present her ministry and raise more support. But I am looking forward to discover what God will do through her at Rovereto and generally in the church. I am sure I will get lots of surprises.

The new Bible study group (and hopefully one day church) in the western Valsugana has started reasonably well, although having so many small children means that there are more absences due to illnesses than usual. It also means there has to be a lot of shouting to get the Bible study done over the sound of the children. Apart from the 6 couples, there are 8 children from Stefania's age down. There were two more on the way, but

continuing with our church growth strategy there are now three more.

This sort of church growth has also meant a growth in the Sunday School class (7-10 years) that Pinuccia and I (and another lady) take turns to teach. Last year, there were a maximum of 5 children, and usually 3 or 4 present. It was fairly manageable. With two new children coming to church, and two others coming up from the class of the smaller children, there is now a theoretical maximum of 9, although only 8 have come so far. With all of us around a table for six people (because there is no room in the corridor where we meet for a larger table), instead of being "fairly manageable" it is more like "total chaos". In situations like this, it is good to know that it is God who teaches, and not my ability to keep the children in line.

On the computer

For the past three years, I have been posting at least weekly updates and prayer points on my blog at <http://richard.laparola.net/> Since there are probably more Facebook users than habitual blog readers out there amongst my supporters, I now have a Facebook page as well, which basically contains all of my blog posts a few minutes after they are posted. So if you would like news from Trento more often, look for me or my e-mail address on Facebook, and make me one of your friends.

Upcoming events

13-15 November: A weekend of meetings with Louis Priolo on the Christian family and the Biblical principles for educating children, including a prayer morning with *Moms in Touch*.

22 November: Monthly church service at Rovereto.

6 December: The Sunday School's "Christmas market" in the church, to raise funds for the school they support in India. On 28 November there will be an afternoon together with the children to prepare the material that will be sold.

8 December: Three public conferences on "The evangelical faith, from the Reformation to the contemporary world" with Carl Trueman from the Westminster Theological Seminary in USA.