

News and prayer info from Richard, Pinuccia, Stefania and Daniele Wilson

Number 81, September 2012

On the 16th September 1992, a much younger me arrived in Italy. So for this special edition, I have gone through my last 80 newsletters and picked out some highlights. I have also added some things which were not in past newsletters, because I did not realise their importance at the time. And some things which I wrote thinking that they were important, turned out not to be. The future is always in God's hands, and not as we imagine it will be.

As I read my old newsletters, there was a lot of nostalgia, remembering people that I had forgotten all about, wonderful experiences, and especially the faithfulness of God who has accompanied me and led me in his direction, not mine, in all this time. So it is an opportunity for both me and you to thank God for what he has done through me. And it is also an opportunity for me to thank all of you, for your faithfulness in supporting me, many for all these 20 years, without ever tiring or giving up. In fact I have calculated that through the generosity of my supporters more than half a million dollars has been given for my ministry, and only God knows how many prayers. What follows is your story as well, not just mine.



Before

June 1993: After language school at Florence, I was at Trento (and travelling elsewhere) preparing for ministry. "One reason for coming to Trento was the existence of two students (Pippo and Salvo) in the congregation. But they have left for military service. My role now is pioneering a group in a university with no protestant students. This is something I wasn't prepared for, have little idea about how to do, and gives me some apprehension. I am praying for a Christian student to move to Trento." This prayer was repeated in the prayer letters every summer for 10 years—and not once did God not send one.

November 1993: Angelo started Bible studies in the Val di Non. "Part of our vision is to start at least three more churches in the province. It is perhaps a bold plan for a church with 23 regular attenders. But we know that God can do it and believe that is how he would want us to reach *all* of Trentino. I want to remind you to keep praying for this (and for many years yet)".

May 1994: After many impediments and obstacles, the first meeting at the university with some students.

June 1994: I was invited to dinner by Pippo, where there was also Pinuccia on her way to Switzerland to go to Bible college. We can not remember speaking to each other.

17 July 1994: I was the crowd at the Italy-Germany cricket match at Trento, the same day Italy lost the World Cup football final.

September 1994: "I realised that Gloria and Enrica, who started the year as associated with the congregation, ended it as Christians". I now share teaching a Sunday School class with them. They are married to Jury and Pippo respectively.

March 1995: The problems in organising meetings at the university continued—I succeeded only 3 times in 12 attempts. (See the next page.) But "the effect of studying the Bible has been particularly stunning on Ilaria and Cristina. I have never seen people

"I have never before come across such a sustained series of set-backs, which remain despite much prayer by myself and many of you. And it was impossible not to reflect on such things. It is one thing to believe in the sovereignty of God; it is another to put it into practice when everything goes contrary to what you would expect he would want to happen. Which is where I have learnt what it means to trust God: that he knows what he is doing even though I don't understand why, since he has bigger plans to bring glory to himself than the holding of Bible studies here. And it is also a great reason and motivation to persevere. I might have given up on the group long ago had I not been sure that God is at work despite these problems and is not frustrated by them." (from March 1995)

so visibly taken aback by reading how Jesus wants us to respond to him".

April 1995: The first public release of my Bible computer program, for DOS.

July 1995: We managed to do a fourth Bible study at the university, on the last day of the academic year, because I had met Paolo and Maurizio at an open day for the student associations, and wanted to do something with them before the holidays. They became the stalwarts of the group for many years.

September 1995: "2 by 2000: the vision to start new independent congregations in the valleys around Trento The title was chosen more for its catchiness than for its realism. But it is a reminder to pray for this vision: for the congregation to continue to persevere in it, for others that might move to the province to help us in it, and most importantly that God will work in the lives of people here to bring them to him."

1995-96: The 'golden year' of my university ministry, with five students attending, being gripped by the Gospel, and reaching out to others with what they were learning.

May 1997: "I met Christian at one of the Young Adults' meetings. He is very open to listen and ask deep questions about Christianity, and more importantly to obey what he is learning about Jesus, as he earnestly desires to get his life together before God. I have met with him a few times, and we have started reading the Bible together." I spent a lot of time with Christian over the next few years, before he went his own way not wanting to follow God any more. Later he came back and is now attending another evangelical church at Trento.

June 1997: The first of four summer missions at Perugia that I was a part of. Personally, they were wonderful experiences

for getting out of my comfort zone and learning to trust God. And for helping a number of people to know Jesus.

October 1997: Version 3.0 of the computer program rewritten in C++, and downloadable from Internet for the first time.

October 1998: Romeo Dinale, the missionary pastor, had recently left, and I had been in Australia for a few months. "What struck me most when I returned is the greatly increased commitment by the church members. People in the church have realised that they need to take more responsibility, and are doing so showing more commitment and enthusiasm". I took responsibility for the Valsugana group, and started what I called my Titus 1:5 period: the missionary that is not the church planter nor the pastor, but establishes the leadership of the church: the elders Pippo and Angelo, and then also the other leaders.

December 1998: The first church outreach at Rovereto, a bookstall.

July 1999: Paolo, the last student from the 'golden year', graduated. From now on, every academic year I would have to restart the university ministry from scratch, with the student that God sent that year.

October 1999: My computer program was put on the CD attached to one of the main Italian computer magazines. I also started visiting other missionaries and ministries to help them with computer issues, and to create web sites for others.

October 2000: I started learning to play the clarinet, and a few months later was playing in Trento's town band.

August 2001: To host all my computer material, I created the Internet web site <http://www.laparola.net/>.

September 2001: A new phase in my ministry, now that the church leadership was established: start things that the church members could not do themselves (sometimes because not able to, usually because no time to do it), and train others to take over. I tried (unsuccessfully) to start a Youth Group for 4 teenagers.

August 2002: After 7 years, I finished the Bible dictionary for my computer program with all the names of the Bible.

October 2002: I started to lead a second Bible study group at Trento, and in April a third, the beginning of the church cell group ministry. It has been one of the best instruments for increasing commitment and training leaders in the church.

April 2003: There were various hints in the newsletter to the big event that was not yet public knowledge—I had started going out with Pinuccia.

July 2003: “I have been changed in the last three months, and I much prefer what I have become. After half a lifetime of singleness, suddenly having to think first about another person has made me more sensitive towards others, and improved my relationships with others and with God. In fact, even before they knew I was going out with Pinuccia, a number of my friends noticed that I was different, even through they did not understand the reason for the changes”.

August 2003: Not having had enough time before for my three ministries, and now needing to spend time with Pinuccia as well, I decided to finish up my university ministry in the next few months. “It saddens me a bit, because after being at the university in some capacity every year for the past 22, it is obviously a big part of my life. And I still enjoy being with and working with university students more than any other group. But I am happier more than I am saddened, because I have a new ministry, to Pinuccia and to a future family if it comes.” (I have the same feelings about university ministry now, nine years later.)

February 2004: I finished my Greek-Italian interlinear of the NT.

April 2004: Wedding day.



April 2005: Massimo and Jury were ready to take over the leadership of the Valsugana group. At the same time, there is “the fulfilment of a 10 year dream, vision and prayer” - a few people started attending the church from Rovereto, and I was able to start a small group there. “Pray that from this group a church will be born one day—a process that will take a lot of time”, although it turned out it did not take as long as I was

thinking. This was also the start of a theme I noticed repeatedly in the next six years: when God wants us to start something new, he gives the opportunity and the resources (in our case, the leaders at just the right time) to do it.

September 2005: Mariangela is ready to take over the leadership of the Val di Non group, which frees Angelo to lead one of the Trento small groups, which frees me to help Pinuccia start a Youth Group for the teenagers, with help from Gloria.

October 2005: Stefania is born.

January 2007: For a small group pizza and film night, the members had chosen to watch *The Da Vinci Code*. When two non-Christian husbands came as well, I thought it might not have been a good choice. But the discussion was helpful, and a few days later Massimo rang Angelo to say that he wanted to be converted. He and his wife Angelita are now two of the missionaries we have sent to plant the Rovereto church.

May 2007: “The Young Adults’ group was restarted after a pause of almost a decade”, under the leadership of Marcio. This group has been one of the main factors in the growth of the church since then.

August 2007: Daniele is born.

September 2007: Carmelo and Andrea start leading one of the Trento small groups, allowing me to dedicate more time to Rovereto.

November 2007: Version 7.0 of the computer program, rewritten in C#, more modern and much improved.

July 2008: The first church children’s camp, although we were in Australia and so not involved. But we have been a part of the other camps, which continue to grow and have a big effect on the children’s lives.

September 2008: The teenagers moved to the Young Adults’ group, and the Youth Group is not needed anymore. Pinuccia, Gloria and I start a third class for the Sunday School instead.

November 2008: André starts a group at the university, and there are 10 students at the first meeting, which made me a bit happy and a bit jealous, since I never reached such numbers in 10 years of trying.

July 2009: Suzanne Bikker arrived to serve at Rovereto. This was the answer to 14 years of prayer by many for others to come to help our church planting. She is a great help to the ministry at Rovereto. Keep praying for more such people.

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September 2009: The official launch of *Altrimenti*, the social-cultural arm of the church. It has been effective in reaching areas of the society that we could not have done in the name of the church.

June 2010: I became an Italian citizen.

July 2010: I ended my direct involvement in the Rovereto ministry, leaving it to Angelo, Suzanne and those from Rovereto.

September 2010: I started a Youth Group again, with help from Daniela. Having trained her, a year later I was able to leave the group to her leadership, with Ruben helping her.

April 2011: The highlight of 20 years of ministry: the commissioning service for the people sent to the church at Rovereto, fulfilling a vision started in 1993. "There were quite a few tears shed, a mixture of the joy of a historic moment in the life of both of the churches, and the sadness of sending people to a new ministry. It was a time of remembering God's faithfulness over the 48 years of ECM work at Trento". The church fully started its autonomous existence in September.



September 2011: Another new phase of my ministry: supporting the leaders of the various church ministries more directly, especially a new generation of leaders (Fosca, Daniela, Ruben, Nick and Jenn, Beatrice) that God raised up at just the right time, after sending many of our most gifted people to Rovereto. And now a brief look forward in time as well,

Upcoming events

because as is often the case the autumn months are full of special events to pray for. *September 21-23:* A training weekend for young adults and those who work with them, with some international speakers and youth from outside Trento coming to participate. It is part of the bigger vision that Marcio and the other leaders have for the young adult ministry at Trento.

October 2-4: ECM Italy prayer days.

October 12-14: I go to Madrid for a meeting for ECM country leaders.

October 29-November 2: The family goes to Lisbon for a retreat for the ECM Australian missionaries.

All these trips in the same month remind me of all the travelling around Italy and Europe that I did when I was young. I have not done so many trips in a month since I was married. I am looking forward to them!



After