



NEWS FROM THE GIRARDS IN ARREZO, ITALY

December
2024

End of the Year Update

Hello Friends and family in Christ!

We are SO SORRY for the late update! We skipped some months, truly it's been one of our busiest seasons on record, but also very good! To sum up this year in just a short sentence, it was a year of discipling, mentoring, teaching, and being a vessel of healing and rest to others. We welcomed more than 250 people throughout the year for meals, and hosted around 50 people for the nights this year about a total of 5 months' worth. We had very deep and meaningful conversations with many. Since we have other commitments now to the new school project, we have stepped down from some of our responsibilities in our local church, so that we could focus on our move to Florence, as well as giving the time and energy to the people God was bringing to us. We've been seeking to be a deeper level of image bearers of the Father. We want our thoughts and actions to reflect His love and image. Sometimes, we find these newsletters hard to write and give depth to how we serve God here because the discipleship and mentorship is very private. Everything we have done this year, we've done with JOY and PLEASURE for others, and we hope next year to accommodate more lovely people.

Currently our most important commitment is to meet up with our team for the school in Florence. We text often in our group to keep the information and prayer flow. Last month, we reached out to the Mayor of Florence to ask for a building and will have a meeting coming up in the next weeks! They have received our request and are willing to discuss it! Please keep praying for this, it would be a real miracle if they can help us get a building. It would mean we could potentially start in 2025 ONLY if we can get some type of rental building (or free building) that is approved to have a school. Parents are getting more interested in the school and feeling the need for it in churches. The anticipation and excitement are growing. If you haven't yet, please watch our professional video at the end.

Soon we hope to launch our new businesses so that we can slowly work to become self-employed. Nicolas is working on opening an e-commerce selling Italian olive oil of different levels of quality. (If you want olive oil, please write us! We are ready to ship but the website isn't up.) I have started my touring company, Bella Tuscany Tours and have already served several clients! We've also toured more than 60 days with guests and clients all over Italy this year! Also, my cat breeding is going extremely well. I run an ethical breeding program which means we are only breeding females in a safe and healthy way and the females who show "motherly" qualities. I find I get to share the gospel in a unique way with clients and other cat lovers. In January I will attend an event where I can share my Toygers with handicap children and adults as therapy pets! Nicolas is looking for another job in Florence as a transition until we can be self-employed. He must give a 4-month notice at his current job. (He is an account manager for the luxury furniture contractor). When he is interviewed for new jobs in Florence, this is sometimes a hinderance as companies are anxious to hire and need someone urgently. If you're wondering why he had to commit to 4 months when he signed the contract, it's because he is very good at what he does and can do it speaking 3 languages fluently, and his boss was very aware he will be hard to replace.

But we are trusting God even in this. Florence is about double the cost of living than what we used to and now we have a child in college and Olivia will attend the school we are starting. Let's just say, we are working on having more streams of income until we are self-employed and living partially off your generous donations. Both Nicolas and I enjoy working and being deeply integrated into society, but we need to also do it in balance with the demands of developing this school project.

We don't know exactly what house we are going to be moving into yet, we have some options right now to rent, and that's the direction we are going. We found the area of Florence that would be best for us, so we hope it works out and are planning accordingly. So, our next steps are: 1. Find Nicolas a steady job he can work until we are self-employed. 2. Find a house to rent. 3. Start packing. Sounds easy right? Moving in Italy can be a real challenge. We love this country, but things move VERY slowly here, especially bureaucracy. When you change houses, you often have to take apart your kitchen and move it too! Not only the kitchen, but most everything else, including the light fixtures, closets, bathroom furniture, etc. We are also excited to share that God has put a very special family on our path, the Thomases. They are American but live in Florence. We have kids the same age and they are also homeschooled. Our kids all basically became best friends over night. They have been graciously inviting our kids over the weekend to attend their AWESOME youth group in their church in Florence. Something our kids never got the privilege to attend as our church/city doesn't have any youth group and almost no other Christian youth. God is making special steps for us to transition to Florence and this family has been one of those mercies God has given us.

We are SO EXCITED that at the beginning of the year we will welcome some great servants of Jesus, kicking off the year serving the brethren, some of the leaders of Leia's home church in Kansas. They are coming to see the progress of the school project and see how they can be of service.

Speaking of next year - it is going to be a big one, because the pope proclaimed 2025 to be the "year of Jubilee", which will bring around 40 million pilgrims on top of the 50 million tourists they already expect. Just as a quick understanding of what that means, it's a time the church sells indulgences (one of the main reasons the reformation happened!). If you complete certain things such as visit churches, make prayers to dead popes or saints, and give money to "the poor" (basically who the church wants you to give to) then you receive forgiveness of ALL SINS. If you've ever read the bible then you know that this is one of the greatest deceptions of the catholic church, that anyone but God can forgive sins. What about all the people in the world who could not afford such a pilgrimage? What about their sins? Help us Lord, have mercy! ("I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one come to the Father except through Me." - John 14:6)

Eva is coming back from the USA, where she is a full-time student at the University of Northern Colorado. She will be with us for about 3 weeks, and we are super excited, more than we can say! We are very proud of her initiatives in her studies, majoring in international affairs and criminology. She also became a fire fighter (in her spare time!), believe it or not. She's new at it but plans to work as a fire fighter next summer as she keeps finishing those certifications. Also, big news, Elise has passed her drivers exam (which in Italy is very challenging, nothing like in the USA) and she is driving a scooter around town helping with errands. Elise also has the opportunity to study in a Blue Zone (areas in the world where people live the longest) in Sardegna, where some believer friends of ours will teach her ancient recipes of making sourdough bread. We are so happy to see and hear God opening these doors for our children. Sophie is quite good at volleyball and studies 9th grade. She works with a tutor twice a week to keep her Italian at academic levels and she is my biggest help in the cat business. She is very good at caring for kittens. Isaiah is preparing for the 8th grade exam that gets you to pass into high school, which is an intense exam, so that keeps him busy. And he turns 13 next week! Olivia is as always, such a blast and the funniest kid ever.

We want to end the newsletter giving thanks to God for his love and grace towards us and for another year you kept us here by giving and praying. This year was our 20th year living in Italy together as a family serving the church and the society in the name of Jesus. Any end of year donations will be a huge blessing to us as expenses have been higher than normal this year, for different reasons. First, we had a lot of vehicle expenses this year. Isaiah's and Sophie's tutors and exams can stretch us thin some months, and the simple fact of hosting so many people all year isn't easy on an Italian salary. So we thank you for your help and generosity!

Happy Thanksgiving everyone! We will be hosting 16 people to celebrate together!

Nicolas, Leia, Eva, Elise, Sophie, Isaiah and Olivia

Here is a photo dump of all the great people we fellowshiped with this year:



Judging our male Romeo at the TICA cat show of Reggio Emilia



My first cat show with my "assistant" (my cousin Clara from Colorado)



Fellowshipping with ministry partners in Arezzo



Bella Tuscany Tour clients visiting a Christian artist who is discipling young people through his art, in Florence



Game night with company last week - God sends really neat people to our home



A thermal pool day with friends



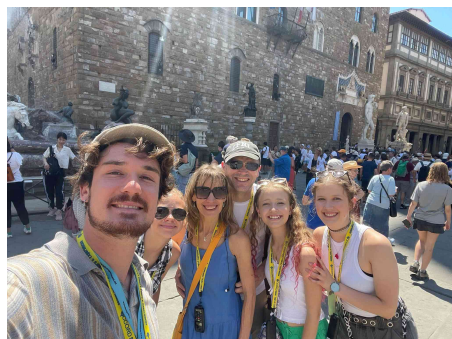
Visiting a medieval parade with our new friends the Thomases



Heading to youth group in Florence



Taking advantage of a cat pick up to enjoy the beaches of Sardegna



A Christian tour guide in Florence, with visiting ministers

