

Corato, Italy
December, 2020

Stevanus News



Dear Praying Friends,

Although 2020 seems to be the year everyone soon wants to forget, we have to say that some good things took place for which we thank the Lord, both in the life of our church and with our personal family.

After the initial lockdown, we enjoyed some normalcy heading into the summer months. As we have been doing annually, we had our **combined Life Group meeting/potluck** on our terrace and enjoyed a special time of testimonies and challenge for the future.

*“For the Son of Man
came to seek and
to save the lost.”
Luke 19:10*



Most of our church families returned to weekly attendance despite the fact that we continue to measure our temperatures, wear masks, and maintain a 6' seating distance. Over the summer, we were able to plan and hold our **annual family camp** although with a smaller number than usual attending. We enjoyed beautiful weather and the chance to be outdoors. A woman who is going through a hurtful separation, who Denise has been counseling, was able to come and even brought a friend. As usual our group was mixed ages but that actually enriches our times of communion and sharing.



As September rolled along, students returned to school and even our Sunday school classes and Life Groups started up. Unfortunately, this was all short-lived as by the fall public school classes and most church meetings were back online. Church doors have remained opened for those who wish to attend. Some of our church members have **tested positive for COVID** but only one young man fell quite ill because he is diabetic, however his mother and uncle both passed away while he and his brother were hospitalized. He is now home.

*“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.
John 10:10*



*“I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.
John 12:46*

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Heading into Italy's second wave, observing how other countries face the pandemic and keeping an eye on American's political situation, we often ask ourselves *will life ever return to normal* or are we on the wake of the Lord's imminent return. The thought came to mind that the best way to prepare for the second coming would be to take another look at Jesus' first coming. In fact, in preparation for Life Group ministry, Denise began developing a series of lessons on the many times Jesus declared, **“I have come to ...”** throughout the Gospels. An underlying theme is that He came to bring salvation! It

seems clear that as we prepare the body of Christ for His second coming, why not clearly stay focused on the Word as it reveals the **purpose of his first coming**, beyond what we normally meditate on at Christmas?

As we mentioned earlier, 2020 did bring some **significant blessings to our family**. Over the months we found out that both our eldest Dena, and youngest Dimitri, started dating seriously. This has been a great answer to prayer because as parents, it is natural to want to see your adult children find a companion with whom to serve and walk with through life. In addition, our son Daniel, who is a youth pastor in SC, was able to take advantage of great incentives and purchased his first home. And last but not least, our 4th grandson Zander, was born at home, weighing in at 10 lbs. 1 oz. while his parents, Chris and Marie, are on furlough.

It's been four years since we were all together for Christmas and despite travel risks under Covid restrictions, we decided to fly home for the holidays as **getting all our family together** is a rarity these days. For Thanksgiving we were able to gather together in Ohio enabling us to include Mark's father, a young 82 and his brother and nephews who flew in from Florida. It was special to share around the table the things each one was thankful for as well as spend time with cousins.

As we plan to fly back to Italy on January 10th and look to this new year, we have adopted Jesus' same vision in Luke 4:43: *“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.”* One of the positive results of Covid-19, if there is a such a one, is that the church where we minister, certainly along with many other churches around the world, is constrained to be innovative about ideas for ministry and outreach. Our missionary vision is one of constantly reaching more new places and cities to preach the Good news. After several years of ministry in our church, our pastor has asked us to present **a specific vision** for the first time, which we will be presenting in January towards how we want to reach our neighboring cities. We ask prayer to be able to communicate the vision of the home groups to them with a solid **PLAN OF ACTION**, that many will take part in this and the plan will come to fruition.

We sincerely thank you for your support and prayers for all this.

In His service,
Mark & Denise