

*Corato, Italy  
Spring, 2020*



Dear Praying Friends,

In December of 2019, one of the young ladies in our church posted a photo of herself at a 1920s dress up party and we remember thinking: *how nostalgic for this generation to discover how things were 100 years ago.* Little did we know we'd soon be relating to the pandemic of 1918. Some words and update about that in a moment.

A significant event prior to the lockdown was that we were accepted by a mission organization called, **World Outreach Center**. We had the privilege of meeting their director, John Cava, at church in the spring of 2019 when he came to speak and Mark translated for him. Over the months, we prayed about teaming up with this group as they have missionaries serving around the world. After applying, we had a very positive conference call in December and felt they were a good fit for us and hopefully us for them. John was back for a visit to Bari in February. Feel free to check out their website: [worldoutreachcommunity.org](http://worldoutreachcommunity.org).

As we were preparing to put out a prayer letter, **COVID-19**, like a suicide bomber stealthily placed on a public bus, all of a sudden exploded in the Lombardy region of Italy. Like all Italians, we were glued to the TV as news bulletins informed us of what was happening in China and to the way the north of us. Our church had two special events scheduled for March 7 and 8, an area-wide youth night and a women's evangelistic banquet that Denise was organizing, both of which were canceled a few days prior. March 8<sup>th</sup> was our last corporate service for 3 months.

Fortunately, we had started streaming our Sunday services last fall, so we had the necessary equipment and a YouTube account already in place. From the onset, we were both quickly *deputized* into a small media crew of seven meeting every Thursday and Sunday to **broadcast our services live**. During these services, we facilitated interaction from home by way of social media as it was important to our pastor to keep everyone as connected as possible. We both had the opportunity to preach a couple of times during that period as well.

We are very thankful for computer technology, which enables us to stay connected with Mark's father, our siblings and adult children and most of all our three grandchildren who were hunkered down in Thailand but eventually flew to the states, pushing ahead a trip planned for October. We are so grateful that our family is well and continues to work from home, including Denise who was able to keep up with English lessons online with her private HS students and two adult classes. We quickly learned how to **navigate with Zoom**, which came in quite handy for weekly life groups, prayer times and even to continue a marriage course with one couple. In addition, our church's food bank remained in operation and several families were and still are being helped.



*“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.”*

**Psalm 46:1-3**





With our church meeting in an ex-catering hall, we have plenty of space to measure out 4 ft. between chairs and stay under the government limit of 200 people, having entered **Phase 2 on May 24<sup>th</sup>**.



Everyone sanitizes their hands, wears a mask, brings a self-signed certificate of health and gets their temperature taken before every Sunday service. It's a bit uncomfortable but we are adapting and just about everyone has returned.

*“For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.”*  
**Psalm 27:5**

But, where do we go from here as voices of a second virus in the fall fade in and out of the news? They “say” 60% of Italians have already voluntarily downloaded the *Immune app* on their cellphones tracking epicenters of the virus. Our students will return to school in September with masks but no online classes. When will the famous vaccine be available and will we be mandated to get it and or will it be obligatory for international travel? There is some political unrest in Europe but certainly not like what is going on in the States, which the Italian news reports daily. We return to the question we initially asked our Italian pastor back in early March: do you think this is the **beginning of the end times** or is it merely a precursor?



We were able to plan and host a **church family picnic** in the country on Sunday, June 21<sup>st</sup> with a pretty decent turn out including several first-time visitors. It seems like the new believers and ones with whom we have established relationship with were the most excited about coming out. One of our couples took charge of grilling sausage and chicken wings and everyone had a great time with perfect spring weather, rather unusual for late June.

The *fallout* that social distancing has had on our society, church families and youth is of a concern to us. As spiritual leaders, it is important that we seek to get back to a normality in fostering opportunity for **fellowship and ministry outreach**. Some appear to be relatively comfortable with minimal or superficial participation, as Italians can be rather fearful and germ-freaks by nature. This would be our foremost prayer request; perhaps it is very similar to your situation stateside.

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We sincerely appreciated your prayers and support over these past few months and were greatly touched by the many letters and messages of concern although our region was not overly affected. May the Lord guide us all in the days and months ahead as He is ultimately in control and our commitment remains to getting out the Gospel message.

In His service,  
**Mark & Denise**