

Corato, Italy
Summer, 2017

Stevanus News

Dear Friends,

We hope this finds you all enjoying the blessings that summer brings as you spend time with family and friends partaking in special activities which happen this time of year. A glance at the calendar indicates this update is past due and it is my (Mark) hope that this will bring you up to date on what we are doing.



We continue to work with *Next Level International* here in Italy where a primary objective in NLI's philosophy is *supporting and training national workers* for ministry. In a prior letter we had reported that we were nearing the end of our initial 3-year project involving three new church plants, which included six leadership seminars over that period. This included training Italian church planters, pastors and their coworkers. Our **sixth concluding seminar** was held the first weekend of May here in our city of Corato. This event, while on one hand was bringing the project to conclusion, also earmarked the beginning of something new. That something new means that we now have greater potential to build on what has been done. While the partners in the three-year startup concluded their basic pastoral studies, our base has broadened and we now look forward to new ways to build on this initial foundation. During this period, three new churches have been started and are growing, and the workers are also *growing in their experience* in serving the Lord. The feedback has been most positive and demonstrates that our work is effective as we see leaders built up, encouraged and matured.

Therefore, we are moving forward with phase two, called ***Emerging Leaders***, which is focusing on bringing together national leaders of larger churches and organizations, especially those with significant *youth movements*. Through this we will set up a similar method that will incorporate biannual meetings

for training and encouragement. It also adds the element of planning large youth rallies to reach mass groups of young people in various regions throughout Italy. This is a very important objective as there are voices here in Europe doing similar things but using deceptive means of leading young people astray with a diluted Gospel. We are confident that as we forge ahead, this phase will also see much success. The initial enthusiasm is already giving us reason to expect wonderful things in the near future.



Regarding local ministry, we are seeing much positive growth, even if slow at times, in the **cell group** that we lead. Both of our lead couples are getting married soon, one in July and the other in September. This only means that we may not hand off this ministry immediately as they both are wanting to get settled into their marriages in this initial stage. However, they both represent new potential cell groups starting up towards the end of 2017 in two neighboring towns.

As to our family, many of you are aware that we are **facing cancer on two different fronts**. One of course is our son Daniel, in Lexington, SC who had surgery two weeks ago to remove affected lymph nodes. The other is Mark's mother, 79 who is experiencing and suffering through stage IV cancer; it is unsure as to how much time is left. For these we greatly appreciate your prayers. At the same time, Denise's mother in New York, who is 91, is not experiencing the best of health. Both of our mothers are in need of nursing or hospice care at this time. We will be making some unexpected trips this summer to assist and support family caregivers. Having an ocean between us is not the easiest in times such as this.

We greatly thank you for your prayers as well as support for our ministry.

In His Service,

Mark & Denise

II Timothy 3:10,11-14 *"You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings ... continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ..."*