



## Spring Update: Rachel's Vineyard Italy Mission (*Easter Week 2014*)

Dear Friends,

Easter Joy to you and your families!

I do hope that the blessed surprise of our renewed collaboration with our U.S. sponsor of the last 5 years will make possible your partnership in the Italy Mission during the year 2014.

As we reported to you a few months ago, in carrying out this Mission my husband Domenico and I are joined by a wonderful team that includes a Catholic psychologist, two wise and caring priests and three former participants - one in her 30's from Tuscany, one in her 40's from near Switzerland, and one in her 50's from near Padova in the region of the Veneto. We see ourselves as **ambassadors for the Divine Physician** who desires to heal the wounds left by abortion in the hearts and minds, souls and relationships of those we serve.

Having celebrated with the whole Church the first year of Pope Francis' leadership, the members of our Mission team feel renewed energy to ***"go to the peripheries, not only in the geographical sense but also the existential peripheries..."***, as our Holy Father encourages.



Just yesterday **Francis spoke of the abortion experience** as one that drives people into these "peripheries":

**“Abortion compounds the grief of many women who now carry with them deep physical and spiritual wounds after succumbing to the pressures of a secular culture which devalues God’s gift of sexuality and the right to life of the unborn.”**

*Pope Francis, 25 April 2014, ad limina visit from Southern Africa’s bishops*



*In response to those carrying such wounds, Francis exhorts us to **“move towards people... toward those who perhaps are physically near but are spiritually distant. Don’t be afraid to go out and go towards these persons and these situations.”***



*He encourages and models creativity, admonishing:  
**“Don’t let yourselves be blocked by prejudices, habits, mental or pastoral rigidities, or by the famous phrase, ‘we’ve always done things this way!’”***



## Mission Progress Winter-Spring 2014

- Our last 3 *Rachel's Vineyard* retreats, offered in Bologna, have been subscribed to maximum capacity and have drawn women and men from all over Italy. More **married couples** are participating together, and this shared experience bears beautiful fruit in the months following the retreat. Three retreat dates are already scheduled for 2014-15 and in the meantime **we companion by phone and email those requesting help.** *Below you will meet one of these women.*
- Having recently acquired a program to dub and subtitle video materials, in March **we established an Italian Rachel's Vineyard YouTube channel** with 8 videos already translated and posted. Special thanks to my husband Domenico for his painstaking technical work done evenings and weekends for the ministry. We already see this exciting technical development reaching many women and men!



*Domenico and one of our host Sisters upon departure on Monday following the 3-day Rachel's Vineyard Retreat in Bologna*

- Our **two team priests met this month with Bologna's Cardinal Caffarra** to follow up on my annual written report and discuss strategies for the ministry's growth. While we have yet to receive any funding from the Cardinal, he **reaffirmed his blessing of our work.**
- In January we delivered to the Diocese of Bologna Family Life Office 1,000 copies of **a brochure developed for couples preparing for sacramental marriage.** The brochure is now included in the marriage preparation packet given to all couples.

- A priest serving as chaplain in one of Milan's main mother-infant hospitals, as well as a Catholic psychotherapist from the same area, attended our February retreat and together with our team are now **discerning the possibility of bringing the retreat to the Milan area.**
- In March 2014 we **exhibited at a conference in Rome**, where our psychologist and 4 former participants served as ambassadors for the apostolate. Our psychologist was a **featured speaker on post-abortion grief and healing.**
- One of our program alumnae gave the **closing testimony at a February 2014 Respect Life Month event in the Diocese of Padova.** Many said this was the first time they heard a story of the pain of abortion and the beauty of God's healing power. She received a standing ovation and an invitation to speak again in the future.
- We are in final preparations for the **May 4, 2014 March for Life in Rome.** This will be our first-ever presence at this annual event. The signs we have printed will bring a ***unique message of hope and healing***: "Abortion hurts, Jesus heals." Each in its own way, the Italian pro-life movement, the Italian Church and the secular culture that has blessed state-paid abortion for over three decades, needs to see this new, thought-provoking message that our participants confirm is potentially life-changing!



## **New Testimonies**

The above program highlights don't even begin to tell the full story of lives touched and transformed by the *Rachel's Vineyard Italy Mission*. The following testimonies do.

I begin with an email received just last week, which shows **the great unmet need of those who find us** and the hope they carry in their hearts:

***" My name is Antonella and I, too, carry in my heart great pain and guilt. I had an abortion in 1996 at age 27. I remember the date and every sensation I felt on that day and the days following – it's all so vivid still... The biggest mistake and the part that I most regret is not having at least talked with my mother... I did discuss my decision with my brother, who'd always also been a friend, and he tried to dissuade me, but to no avail..."***

***... Even as I've metabolized the emotional pain, the guilt is still there. The spiritual pain of having offended Jesus, to whom I feel strongly tied, remains strong. After that experience I was never able to go to confession for fear of being chased out of the church. So I limit my church visits to moments in which I pray silently, seeking comfort in the words of Jesus' Divine Mercy...I'd like to take part in your program to deal with this constant feeling of being a "sinful woman".***



***...After that horrible experience and the emptiness it left inside, I married civilly in 2006 but never had kids... Despite great efforts we weren't able to. This brought me a whole new pain because I attributed this infertility to my gesture of 10 years earlier... I also didn't feel worthy of a family, so for a long time I again isolated myself... So often I've entered church with the desire to look a priest in the eye and tell him my story, but again, I've never gotten up the courage to confess this... I just feel unworthy and paralyzed by fear... I need help.***

***I've looked at your site over the last couple years but only now did I find the courage to write you... Thank you for listening and for your closeness."***

Remarkable, isn't it? This sister of ours has been reading our website for over a year and only now has found the courage to contact us. **How many more like her we hope to reach!!**





**A cohabitating couple in their mid 30's** with a 2 year-old daughter had aborted their second child just months before finding us. Their entire family project was crumbling. Even knowing they would not share quarters during the weekend as they do at home, the couple travelled over 2 hours to Bologna and courageously participated in the 3-day retreat. They have stayed in close contact with us and their fellow participants in the months following. Six months after the retreat they baptized their living daughter and are now discerning Christian marriage as a next step in building their life together. They now have friends with whom they share their budding faith. They pray daily and have come to recognize what they often call their "blindness" in having lived many years thinking they had no need for God's presence in their daily lives. Their journey continues, especially in healing family of origin relationships that strongly contributed to the abortion decision.

This mom reflected on her participation in Rachel's Vineyard:

***" This was a unique and profound experience. The Church doesn't turn its back on you. I'd always considered the Church a bit bigoted but I was wrong. There's a great sense of sharing and solidarity among the retreat participants and team. ... I was able to see the fragility and vulnerability of my partner and all of his pain. He asked my forgiveness. I can't condemn him anymore."***



A husband from Northern Italy, who participated with his wife, said:

***"This is a healing process that proceeds step by step and is well prepared and well organized. ... The sharing of stories in the small group, including our family of origin and the traumatic events of our life was a big help.... it wasn't easy for me to speak about certain experiences but here I never felt uneasy, and hearing other stories was***

*positive. This retreat will help me a lot in my faith journey. Thank you for your presence and for the great affection you showed us."*



A wife from Rome who participated with her husband for the abortion they'd experienced 25 years earlier, before marrying, said:

*"Having participated with my husband was undoubtedly a work of God, Who inspired and led us to attend together. Joining in this experience helped us to "not harden our hearts" and to talk openly about our poverties. We were able to let go of our hiding and our false sense of pride, to allow the truths of our experience to come to light and to let mercy enter our relationship."*



While we make great effort to prepare participants for the intensity of the process into which we invite them, the **spiritual intensity of the retreat often surprises** them. In the words of one participant:

*"The retreat allowed me a most precious encounter with Jesus. It was conducted on a deep level and was marked by a high degree of professionalism and knowledge of the Word of God... words alone can't express the importance of this experience for me. Honestly, I wasn't prepared for such a deep encounter, even if in the pre-retreat period I appreciated and benefited from the availability of the team and the various members with whom I shared my experience and the motivations behind my choice to take part..."*

Another participant particularly appreciated the **team members who themselves had been through abortion** and now offered their companionship and testimony to others:

***"I experience a deep connection with one of the team members who'd been through the same experience and her presence was particularly precious because she knew how to support me throughout the three days of the retreat, particularly at a moment in which I felt bewildered and unsure. For that reason I would say the support of the entire team is a key element of this process..."***



A woman from Central Italy, who aborted at age 26 and came to us 8 years later with no living children, marveled that what she calls the **"epiphany" of having her motherhood recognized**. She wrote this month:

***" When I think about the retreat today I can only say the Lord has truly done so much for me. He has brought me back to life! Just a few months ago I was in total desperation, a desperation that was rooted in having denied my own true identity, that of being a mother. On that weekend I had the opportunity to acknowledge my motherhood, my sweet little girl and her dignity as God's child and my child, the dignity that I'd denied until now. From that moment something changed in me, even my body feels different. It sounds crazy but I feel like I've given birth. The desperation is gone and has made room for the hope of a new life. I will never stop thanking the Lord for this great gift..."***



This lady, who will collaborate with us in our ambassadorial work Rome's March for Life, continues:



*... In recent weeks I have felt the need to have my parents close, a need to share with them and my brother the truth of my experience (my parents never knew about the abortion). I just couldn't go on hiding these important things from them. I talked with the team psychologist and got a bit of advice, and then talked to my brother and my mother. In hearing about the healing process I've gone through with you in these past months, my brother was very loving with me and talked about the Prodigal Son, saying that Jesus wants me to be happy now and that my aborted daughter surely does, too. Nor did my mother judge me. Either she will talk with my dad or I will do so in the near future. I feel such a liberation! Now my little Sara is part of my life and I want those close to me to know about her. Jesus is slowly transforming everything in my life. It's just remarkable."*



### **2013 Funding Achievements**

I am happy to report that in **2013 we had 35 U.S. households and 2 Knights of Columbus Councils partner with us.** (A year-end rush of support was due, I believe, to what appeared to be the vanishing possibility to make tax-deductible donations this year.) In 2012 we had 21 families and 2 Knights Councils support the Mission, so we rejoice in the growth of our Mission family!

Your sacrificial giving allowed my husband and me to be reimbursed for most expenses not covered by Italian program fees and donations, including our first year of insurance on the ministry van we purchased with personal funds. I was additionally able to receive a modest stipend for two of the many translation jobs that Domenico and I completed last year.

Here in Italy, former retreat participants and Italian friends of the ministry have been wonderful about offering **financial aid to participants in need**, thus helping largely cover the immediate expenses of each retreat.

## 2014 Funding Needs and Goals

This year it will again be our **infrastructure costs** and hidden **team costs** that present the biggest challenge. Running our national office costs approximately \$400 per month. (We are grateful to two priests, one American and one Italian, who have covered our first 4 months rent this year! ) Travels to **special events** (such as our May 2014 Rome mission described below), where we have the opportunity to work as ambassadors of God's Mercy for the healing of hearts and relationships, is another key area which your gifts make possible.

Having left paid work in 2007, this year I also hope to raise sufficient funds to be able to receive a stipend for at least some of the **top quality translations** which I produce and publish together with my husband. The lack of local resources continues to make such work critical. And after 6 years of largely unremunerated work founding and directing the *Rachel's Vineyard Italy Mission*, I must begin to strategize how to make directing this apostolate more financially feasible for the long-run. Tutoring a few English students, as I've begun doing in recent months, may help me meet recently increased personal (medical) expenses, but it shouldn't be our chief strategy to meet apostolic expenses.



Our chief **Italian fundraising goal** for 2014-15 is to secure our first financial assistance from Cardinal Caffarra of Bologna, and to build on the initial support received from Italian diocesan clergy who have shown enthusiasm for our work. We are enlisting the help of Fr. Marco, our diocesan team priest from Bologna, hoping to finally receive reimbursement for team travel and lodgings, which cost at least \$200 per team member (over \$1,000 per retreat, given that international regulations require a team of no less than 5 members and we presently have a super team of 6-7 members).

My top **Stateside funding goal for 2014** is to expand our **Monthly/Quarterly supporters** beyond the two families who have so faithfully given in the past 3 years. (Their faithfulness brings us a total of \$70 per month.) In this way we would not rely so exclusively on year-end donations and might be better able to plan special projects to develop the apostolate.

I am also seeking **at least one more Knights of Columbus Council** to join the two that have supported us annually. (One of those two Councils has just completed a 3-year commitment with us, and we are praying they will renew that commitment!)



Naturally, I would like to expand the circle of **Italian-American families** supporting this Mission and finally be able to welcome a first Italian-American organization as a Mission supporter. Perhaps you can help us along these lines by introducing us to someone you know?

## Your Opportunity to make a tax-deductible Italy Mission gift

The Italy Mission receives no financial support from any *Rachel's Vineyard* or *Project Rachel* office in the United States, but thanks to our renewed partnership with our stateside sponsor *Rachel's Vineyard of Colorado*, **we are again able to accommodate your Tax-Deductible restricted Gift** to the Italy Mission.

Together with two mission-minded Councils of the Knights of Columbus, with our faithful friends and the generosity of my husband, your sacrificial gift will assure that this apostolate survives and thrives.



In particular, if you know anyone who might be able to **sponsor in part or entirely the costs of our May 2014 "March for Life" Rome mission**, (approximately € 700 or \$900 U.S.) including travel, one night's convent lodgings and two meals for our core team of 4, such a donation would be a particular godsend! Year 2013 donations already covered the cost of materials to be distributed!

We pray that your participation in the Italy Mission is a blessing to you as it is to us and to those we serve!

## The participation we ask of you

- a) **Pray with and for us!** Before all else, it is through prayer that the Italy Mission is already producing a harvest of lives renewed, marriages healed, and families

restored. Perhaps the "*Good Shepherd*" or "*Prodigal*" prayers on our website will help inspire your prayer!

- b) **Make a financial gift during this Easter Season** to ensure that the Italy Mission continues to grow. You may send a check with the **RESPONSE FORM** on the next page. My collaborator in Fremont, Tara, remains ready to receive and forward your gift to our sponsor. **\*\*NOTE:** Your ability to make a **PayPal** donation at our website remains unchanged, though it does not include the possibility of a tax deduction. (On our Home page click on the American flag and scroll down to "Donate by Credit Card.")
- c) **Tell a friend about the Italy Mission!** If you know someone with a heart for reaching the lost and the hurting, particularly someone of Italian-American heritage or someone who has a special heart for Italy, please forward him or her one of my emails so (s)he can read the testimonies of those we serve, learn about our Mission and consider supporting us.



### ***"Pizza in the Vineyard"***

***This Spring might you consider a donation equal to the amount you would spend with family or friends for an evening at a Pizzeria?***


Simply print the following page (p. 13) and enclose it with your check!  
Or use PayPal at our website!

Thank you once again for partnering with us as we pioneer Catholic post-abortion outreach in Italy! Feel free to email me with any Questions at [mimmont@hotmail.com](mailto:mimmont@hotmail.com).

Affectionately yours in the Risen Christ,

Monika Rodman Montanaro, MDiv

Italy Site Coordinator, Rachel's Vineyard Ministries (*La Vigna di Rachele*)

[www.vignadirachele.org](http://www.vignadirachele.org) (click on the American flag  for the English-language page)

## Year 2014 RESPONSE FORM

### Rachel's Vineyard Italy Mission ("La Vigna di Rachele")

*A Mission of Mercy to the Heart of the Church*

[www.vignadirachele.org](http://www.vignadirachele.org) – [www.rachelsvineyard.org](http://www.rachelsvineyard.org)



Your Tax-Deductible Restricted Gift will go to work exclusively in Italy to sponsor *Rachel's Vineyard* post-abortion healing retreats, phone and internet support, development of training materials for Italian clergy and mental health professionals, speaking engagements and outreach to Dioceses across Italy!

\_\_\_\_\_ I am sending a tax-deductible gift payable to *Rachel's Vineyard of Colorado* (**Check Memo: Italy Mission**) for exclusive use in the *Vigna di Rachele* Italy Mission. *I understand the contact information requested below is NEVER passed on to other individuals or organizations, but used solely for acknowledgement purposes.*

\_\_\_\_\_ With this gift I would like to begin a (circle one) **MONTHLY / QUARTERLY** Mission commitment. Please send me reminders by email.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

(Organization: \_\_\_\_\_)

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY, STATE, ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

(*Rachel's Vineyard of Colorado* Tax ID number: 90-0115001)

Please mail your gift with this COMPLETED RESPONSE FORM to former Rachel's Vineyard retreat team member:

**Tara Somerday**  
37151 Ila Court  
Fremont, CA 94536

*Reminder:*

Check is made out to "Rachel's Vineyard of Colorado" (Check Memo: "ITALY MISSION") and sent to Tara Somerday in Fremont, CA. Tara will forward your check to our sponsor agency in Colorado, so that your gift may be put to work ***exclusively for our Italy Mission***. Questions? Contact Italy Mission coordinator Monika Rodman Montanaro at [mimmont@hotmail.com](mailto:mimmont@hotmail.com)

**Thank you for the prayers and sacrificial giving which make you our Mission partners!**