

Promoting the New Evangelization in Italy
through Post-Abortion Healing:
SPECIAL APPEAL with Ministry Update
(25 November 2013)



*"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."
1 Thess 5:16-18*

Monika Rodman Montanaro, MDiv.
Rachel's Vineyard Italy Mission

Dear Friends,

A Happy Thanksgiving to you and your families!

Having last updated you at Pentecost, it was my plan to do so again at this time, but a **very recent development** lends urgency to my writing:

After 4 years of collaboration, the stateside partner that facilitated your tax-deductible gifts to the Italy Mission has decided to curtail our partnership. It is my understanding that new leadership there has undertaken a major project directed toward the purchase of their own retreat house, and has decided to shed what are perceived as peripheral commitments such as facilitating donations to the Italy Mission.



While this is sad news for us, I can only express gratitude for the 4-year partnership which allowed us to accommodate your tax-deductible gifts for the Italy Mission, precisely at the time of the Mission's birth. Since our apostolate is not yet self-supporting but still depends on the generosity of friends back in the United States, I will seek a new ministry partner willing to facilitate donations to the Italy Mission by offering our donors the 501(c)3 tax deduction they

naturally expect. You may recall that the Italy Mission receives no financial support from any *Rachel's Vineyard* or *Project Rachel* office in the United States other than what you send in response to my once or twice-yearly appeals. Italian donor support is growing slowly but remains limited.

Because it may take some time for me to find a new stateside Italy Mission sponsor, **I hope you find yourself in a position to make one last tax-deductible gift through our current sponsor between now and Christmas Eve, December 24, 2013**. My collaborator in Fremont, Tara, remains ready to receive and forward your gift to our sponsor. In this way I will come closer to getting reimbursed for this year's ministry expenses not covered by program fees and Italian donations. I invite you to read about our latest activities below.



The Church continues to be blessed and challenged by the leadership of the new Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis. Our website homepage offers a personal invitation from our Holy Father:



***"Let the Risen Jesus enter your life, welcome him as a friend, with trust. He is life!
If until now you've been far from Him, take just a little step.
He'll welcome you with open arms.
If you're indifferent, take a risk. You won't be disappointed.
If it seems difficult to follow Him, entrust yourself to Him.
You can be sure that He's close, He is with you, and He will give you
the peace you're looking for and the strength to live as He wishes."***

Our ministry team's message follows:

***If part of your distance or indifference, your disappointment or difficulty
in accepting this invitation has to do with a past abortion experience,***

*we would be happy to offer a listening ear and walk alongside you
as you summon the courage to re-visit that painful chapter of your life story.*

Pope Francis' direct, simple and humble manner is leading many Italians to take a second look at Christ and His Church. It is also making "hearable" our invitation to approach the Christian community for help healing and reconciling past abortion experiences. Women are finding us as they google "**abortion and the Church.**" Thanks to our friends who publicize the ministry, inquiries also arrive from hidden hospital chapels and from Italy's pilgrimage Churches such as the *Porziuncola* of St. Francis at Assisi.

The Rachel's Vineyard Italy Mission Team

The *Rachel's Vineyard Italy Mission* embodies Pope Francis' charge to "**go to the peripheries, not only in the geographical sense but also to go to the existential peripheries: those of the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and of religious indifference, of thought, of all misery.**" After 3 years of activity, it's time I introduce you to some of our collaborators!

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. We are especially blessed to now have 3 "past participant" team members who bring both the power of their own testimony and other unique gifts to the ministry. Allow me to introduce our team:



*Our newest team member (in the middle) is **Daria** from Tuscany. Her story was featured in our Spring update. On her left are my husband **Domenico** and our team psychologist **Valeria** (from Milan). On her right, next to me, is one of our two priests (Brazilian Dominican **Fr. Cristiano**). Two additional team members (from Padua & Brescia) do not appear in this photo.*



*Our second priest collaborator is Bologna native **Fr. Marco** (2nd from right). He served in the past as chaplain on the OB-GYN unit in one of Bologna's biggest hospitals where thousands of state-paid abortions are performed each year. He has a particular passion for reaching the doubtful and those distant from faith or practice of the faith.*

Mission Progress Summer-Fall 2013

- **Our last 2 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 the sharing of this experience bears beautiful fruit in the months following the retreat. Recently we had a 73 year-old couple participate who over 50 years ago had aborted their 2nd and 3rd children. The husband initially was tempted to flee, but ended up sharing some beautiful moments with his wife as they finally acknowledged and honored their children.
- **Summer and Fall special events** included a an exhibit at the **national Catholic hospital chaplains annual convention in Assisi** and the chance to accompany a priest collaborator as he addressed **a group of over 20 clergy in Rome** on post-abortion healing ministry. In June several Rachel's Vineyard past participants joined me in publicizing our ministry at the **Vatican's "Evangelium vitae (Gospel of Life) Day**. We've already welcomed our first retreatant from that outreach effort!
- After years of looking for a prayer card or poster with the tender words of **Blessed John Paul II** to women who have been through abortion (*Evangelium vitae* 99), we finally **printed such cards ourselves and are distributing them** to clergy for posting in parish and other settings.



Monika (r.) with another one of our new collaborators

- We are beginning preliminary 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 will have printed will bring a ***unique message of hope and healing*** much needed in the Italian pro-life movement.
- This summer **we purchased a small used van** to replace our 1999 VW Passat station wagon, which gave the ministry 3 years of faithful service, but which Domenico feared would one day soon no longer rise to the needed level of performance, i.e., an 8-hour drive each way to Bologna from Puglia for each retreat. At our Fall retreat, the van greatly improved our hauling of materials and our shuttle service to and from the train station. Retreat participants experience their travel to the retreat as a true "pilgrimage", and since over 80% of them arrive by public transit (as do most team members), transport is a major need. **Special thanks** to an Italian-American relative who is helping reimburse the costs of this van!



Domenico with Fr. Cristiano at the blessing and dedication of our "new" (used) ministry van.

- Our **translation of the Canadian book “Women’s Health after Abortion: The Medical and Psychological Evidence,”** continues with target completion in early 2014. This resource serves as an invaluable outreach tool to those requesting “secular” resources on the topic, and the website containing the chapters already translated has been active for some time: www.postaborto.info.

Testimonies Summer-Fall 2013

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:



This month’s retreat included a married couple from Rome in their early 40’s. The wife 22 years ago aborted the one child she’s ever carried. For two decades she allowed herself to become consumed by work, refusing to have children during the years when her husband desired them. She now admits she just couldn’t face the fear, guilt and sense of unworthiness that arose whenever she imagined having other children. The wife came to us this summer in the midst of a full-blown marital crisis: for 3 years ago she has been consumed by a desire to have a child that has never arrived. The husband was “checking out”, working 16 hour days, unwilling to indulge his wife’s obsession with having a child at this late moment, and refusing any participation in the her struggle with the demons of abortion and childlessness. The wife originally insisted she wanted to “resolve this alone”, expressing concern that her husband, although baptized and married in the Church, is extremely distant from the Christian faith. His refusal to embrace any deity other than an anonymous “Supreme Entity” led the wife to predict the husband would never engage in a Christian retreat and may actually “cause a scene” if he came with her. The team prayed and by phone and email prepared both husband and wife for several weeks. They arrived together and we were amazed at their participation and results! (Domenico took the husband under his wing at various points of the 3-day process.)

This week the wife wrote:

"I cannot thank you enough for having urged that my husband attend the retreat with me. You know how strong my resistance was. Now I've seen a side of him I never knew existed. I was amazed at his participation, his listening and sensitivity, not only towards me but towards the other ladies. I feel hope, for the first time in a long time, that together we can find a way forward."

The husband's feedback has also been very positive, and he realizes how critical it was that he be present and actively take part in his wife's expression of grief and reconciliation. He spiritually adopted his wife's unborn child, a gesture deeply moving for both, which will surely help this couple regain a sense of shared vocation and gain, perhaps for the first time, a sense of "family".

Update on the Healing and restoration of a young family

You may recall the young civilly married couple from Tuscany that attended our February 2013 retreat. They had aborted their second child due to the possibility of a congenital illness, and both they and their living child suffered tremendously in the aftermath of that decision.

This couple has just given birth to their third child!

In July, after several months of preparation with their local priest, together with their 6 year-old son they celebrated the Sacrament of Matrimony, saying they now realize that to have a good marriage and a strong family, they need Christ at the center. The new baby is "invisible" but already present in this wedding photo:



This time the couple refused genetic testing and underwent a healthy pregnancy. The newborn carries the name Francesco and shows only a slight anemia, so while he may need

some medical assistance over his lifetime, the family returned home from the hospital quickly. The wife writes:

"The Lord has entrusted another child to us, perhaps one that will need a little extra love.... we and the baby's big brother are rejoicing! Your prayers helped us so much, as you can imagine the fears we had to face..."



One of the two retreat houses presently used by the Italy Mission. This lovely complex is close to the city yet "removed" from daily life... a perfect pilgrimage site that helps participants take a long, loving look at their life through the eyes of faith, surrounded by the beauty of creation.

Other comments from our last retreat

"I was finally able to reconcile with my aborted daughter, and now instead of trying to avoid her memory, I'm able to love her. At times I awake in the night and I feel her presence. This was absolutely the biggest gift I've received."

"I was able to see more clearly and deeply the horror of abortion. It became clear to me that what had devastated my life wasn't so much the pain I carried but the denial of that pain."

"The diversity of the retreat group (age, geography, personal situation) was a blessing rather than an impediment. We overcame our shame and broke our silence. Our sharing was honest and intense. Our mutual support was consoling, enriching, encouraging and strengthening..."

"Thanks to the experience of the living scriptures I truly felt the presence of Jesus.... Until now, I'd never prayed directly to Jesus, it was easier to pray to the Mother of God. Instead, here I felt him so close and warm, and saw his face so welcoming and full of mercy..."

Our Italian Funding Goals for 2014

Former retreat participants and Italian friends of the ministry have been wonderful about offering financial aid to participants in need. It is our hidden and infrastructure costs that continue to present a challenge.

Our chief Italian fundraising goal for this upcoming year is to secure our first financial assistance from Cardinal Caffarra of Bologna, as well as 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 team lodgings, which cost at least \$200 per team member (over \$1,000 per retreat).



Our year-end 2013 Funding Goals

My modest hope **during this final month of 2013, in which your donation is still tax-deductible**, is to bring in enough donations to fully cover our year 2013 expenses not yet reimbursed, which total over \$3,000. These include the last 3 months (Oct – Dec 2013) cost of maintaining our national office (approx. \$1,200 total), printed materials, other supplies and travels such as the national hospital chaplains conference.

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

While we are greatly encouraged by the few financial gifts that have arrived from Italians, our apostolate is still quite dependent on the generosity of friends back in the United States who wish to see this outreach continue and grow.

Thanks to our soon-to-expire partnership with our stateside sponsor **we are able only through December 24, 2013 to accomodate your final Tax-Deductible restricted Gift** to the Italy Mission.

Your sacrificial gift will assure that this apostolate continues. 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. Please join your prayer, fasting and sacrifice to ours.
- b) **Make a financial gift between now and December 24, 2013** to ensure that the Italy Mission continues during this time of transition. Until that date you may support our Italy Mission by sending a check with the **RESPONSE FORM** on the next page.
- c) **Your ability to make a PayPal donation** at our website will remain 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"), or click here: <http://www.vignadirachele.org/comeaiutarci/comeaiutarci.html>

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.

Affectionately yours in Christ,

Monika Rodman Montanaro, MDiv

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

www.vignadirachele.org (click on the American flag  for the English-language page)

www.progettorachele.org



RESPONSE FORM 2014

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

A Mission of Mercy to the Heart of the Church

www.vignadirachele.org



Your 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 & mental health professionals, speaking engagements & outreach to Italy's dioceses!

____ I am sending a gift by credit card, through the **PayPal** link found on the English-language page of your website. I understand that this gift is not tax-deductible.

____ I am sending a gift **by check** payable to **Monika Rodman Montanaro** (**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.* I also understand that this gift is not tax-deductible.

NAME: _____

(Organization: _____)

ADDRESS: _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP: _____

EMAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

If donating by check, 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 "**Monika Rodman Montanaro**" (Check Memo: "ITALY MISSION") and sent to Tara in Fremont, CA. Tara will have your check deposited so that your gift may be put to work ***exclusively for our Italy Mission***. Questions? Contact Monika at mimmont@hotmail.com or 805-680-0406 (U.S. cell)

Thank you for your prayers and sacrificial giving
which both make you partners in this mission!