



Reaching Men and Women for Christ in Italy

Military and International Communities



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Buon Giorno di Italia!

It comes as no surprise that the influence of the Church is waning throughout the world. Church attendance, belief in God, prayer and believing in the Bible has been dropping for decades. Today's generation is more unchurched than ever before. According to Barna Group, an evangelistic polling firm, the percentage of Generation Z (those 21 years and younger) and millennials (22-37 years old) that identify themselves as agnostic, atheist or not religiously affiliated is double that of the general population in the United States. So how do we reach millennials and Generation Z's? Many church leaders think the way to attract them is through digitally-oriented, non-dogmatic interactive church services. However, research indicates this is not what millennials and Generation Z's crave. They want authenticity—genuine Christianity including sound Biblical teaching and solid Christian community.

That is where we come in. Our ministry is very relational and community-oriented, yet heavy on teaching biblical truth and Christian doctrine. We call young people to the traditional values and practices of the Church, i.e., Christian disciplines like church attendance, bible study, prayer, and serving. We also cultivate authentic Christian community through time, attention, love, caring for their needs, and interactive communication. In addition, we model integrity, transparency, and authenticity to help young people see a Christian faith that is genuine.

Michael Aruaz (left) and Alex Schrom (center) are two millennials who have been challenged in their Christian life since arriving at Aviano Air Base two years ago. Michael is an ammo troop and Alex is a cop. Both grew up in the Church and upon their arrival they jumped into my men's bible study, Wednesday night Bible study/fellowship, and one-to-one discipleship. Like other millennials they were looking for genuineness in the Church and strong interpersonal relationships. Yet, they lacked sound biblical teaching and solid bible interpretation skills. I challenged their status quo mentality and taught them to be "good Bereans" who examine the Scriptures daily to see if what they are hearing is true (Acts 17:11). They have learned how to study the Scriptures carefully, and how to remain fundamentally true to the teaching of the Word. In addition, they have become mindful of impacting the culture instead of letting the culture impact them. Michael will relocate to Alaska in October and Alex to Korea in November.



The Sonnenmoser family has also experienced great spiritual growth over the last year and a half. When we first met the Sonnenmosers they were disgruntled with the Church so they were having "church" at home in their basement. Isolated from the body of Christ they longed for community and connection with other believers. I challenged Dan (an air traffic controller) to come to men's Bible study, bring his family to Wednesday night Bible study/fellowship, and attend Sunday morning services at the Chapel. Within a very short time, they got involved in our bible studies and one-to-one discipleship with Anna and I. The impact of solid biblical teaching and Christian community has been phenomenal in their lives. In their words: "You've shown us how to live in Christian community, what a godly marriage looks like, and how to study the Bible. We'd never even heard of mentorship or one-to-one discipleship until we met you! You've given us more biblical knowledge and understanding of Scripture in the past year and a half than

we ever got growing up in the church! Not to mention the friendship that we've gained. You are the first friends we have had that give us biblical advice. Before you came into our lives we were worldly Christians and our understanding of the Bible only came from what we heard behind the pulpit."

Not only have Dan and Natasha grown in their understanding of the Bible, but they are actively serving in the Chapel. In fact, Dan recently began leading the youth on Wednesday evening. He is also on the Protestant Advisory Council with Anna and I where he brings great insight to issues that affect the congregation. Natasha helps Anna with food preparation for Wednesday night fellowship meal as well as the children's program. Dan desires to become an Air Force Chaplain and is currently attending Seminary online at Liberty University to obtain his Master of Divinity. Unlike many youths from Generation Z, the Sonnenmoser children are being raised in the Church and are growing in their faith. Natasha implemented a solid biblical curriculum as part of her homeschooling program to ground them in the Christian faith. On August 26th I had the privilege of baptizing their 13-year old son, Ashten, in the Livenza River (pictured) near the Santuario Santissima close to Aviano. Dan and Natasha have expressed that their marriage has become Christ-centered, and they are better prepared to raise their children in the admonition of the Lord.



On August 25, 2018 it was my great pleasure to perform a wedding vow renewal for Dustin and Justine Taylor. In front of friends, co-workers, and other believers, Dustin and Justine pledged to live out a God-honoring marriage and teach their two girls (I also had the privilege to baptize) to love and obey the Lord. When Dustin and Justine married in 2008, they were not Christians and did not know God's design for marriage and family. Like other millennials they attended church in their youth, but never understood what it meant to be in a personal relationship with God. They entered marriage hoping to be happy together and have a successful military career. Yet the trials and challenges they faced drew them apart and threatened their marriage. In fact, at one point in 2012 as a result of, in their words, "wrong priorities and selfish ambition" they considered divorce. They went back to church and found Christ, but no one came alongside of them to help them grow. We met them in 2015 and challenged them to

grow spiritually through one-to-one discipleship, Bible study and Church community. Over the last three years we have had the privilege of teaching and mentoring Dustin and Justine in their Christian faith and marriage. As a result, they have grown substantially and are serving in the Chapel community.

A verse that sticks in our mind regularly is "All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10). Such is the fate of millennials and Generation Z if each of us is not diligent to evangelize, teach and exhort them in the Word. Thank you for making it possible for us to minister here in Aviano, Italy. We are grateful for your prayers and financial support.

PRAYER REQUEST: Anna and I were recently notified by the leadership of our church that they have made changes in ministries and finance, and are doing some restructuring on how they handle things related to bookkeeping. Therefore, they have asked us to use the services of a missionary clearinghouse or mission's board starting 1 January 2019. Please pray for us as we diligently seek direction from the Lord for a missions' board. We will let you know when the change is made.

Serving Together In Christ, *John & Anna*