

## ***The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly***

I guess if I'm going to pick a title of a movie for this prayer letter, a Spaghetti Western is pretty appropriate.

The first half of this year had many good aspects. First **the team of people I was working with in Pordenone was a great team**. We got along well, we bonded, and we really worked together well. The school semester went well and the others who were involved with the institute really worked hard to make sure it went well. We had the students involved in ministry throughout the whole semester. They were involved with the church, they taught English, and they did evangelism in the streets in various cities in the area. All this was made possible because of the team.

**I really enjoyed teaching and connecting with the students**. Besides the students from the US, we had an Italian family that attended some of the classes. I taught the theology of missions, Church History and Western thought from 1500 to the present, and Hermeneutics. We had excellent discussions in class and the Italians helped to add an element of biculturalism to the discussions. I really enjoyed it.

Life in the church also had many positive elements. Again, I was working with a good group of people. Besides the institute staff, there were a number of people in the church who contributed to making the church work. What a blessing it was not to have to worry about who is cleaning, organizing the potlucks, etc. It's nice to have people helping with organizing the life of the church and I am very thankful for those who pitched in.

I preached a series on the Psalms. I didn't do all of them, but a select number. The church had gone through a difficult experience before I arrived and a lot of the people were hurting. **I saw some healing begin to take place in the church**. The Psalms are really helpful for that.

I wish I could say it was all good, but that wasn't the case. We were living in Verona and I was traveling back and forth. **When I started in Pordenone I found a huge mess**. I won't go into all the details, but there was a constant stream of people coming to me to tell me about problems in the church and the institute. Really, the problems had to do with the previous leadership. Before I arrived, the same people were leading both the church and institute, so the problems involved both. Again, I won't go into all the details, but these problems included moral failings, poor treatment of other missionaries, a failure to pay bills, etc. It seemed like every week someone was coming to me to bring up more issues. I tried to deal with them as best as I was able and help lead the staff as we waded through the mess.

**About half-way through the semester things really began to unravel**. The prior leadership was in the US, but still involved in the leadership of the mission. They decided to **shut down**

**the school and sell the buildings.** We put forward more than one proposal to keep it open, but they turned those down. It was an incredibly difficult situation for the whole staff.

All of this meant that it was **not a viable for us to move to Pordenone.** This also had quite an effect on the church. Some of the families that had come back, decided to leave again not wanting to hear about all that was going on. The staff at the Bible school was also involved in the church and with the leadership leaving and needed to leave in order to find work elsewhere. **It soon became clear that we also needed to close the church.** That was a sad decision for many of us.

Our last service included a meal together, a time of remembering the good things that God had done through that church, and two baptisms. It's a bit unusual to do a baptism on the last service of the church, but these young people had come to faith in that church, so it seemed appropriate. We are now in the process of emptying the church building and finding a place for everything.

The last few years have been very hard on Jessica and I. We need to consider a new direction and we need to be renewed and refreshed in Lord. **Our Presbytery has directed us to take a sabbatical of at least 6 months, preferably a year** and PMI has agreed to that as well. **Please pray for us** as we really have had an extremely difficult time and really do need some spiritual renewal. We are seeking counseling as well to help us process the various things we've been through.

Some have asked where to send funds. We were going to change missions in order to work with the institute. The mission we were going to go with has effectively been closed. The Lord really helped us avoid a huge mess with that mission. They didn't give me the paperwork and information we needed to transfer and so we stayed with PMI. That really was his protection as we would have been in a very bad place if we had transferred. All that to say, we are still with PMI and will be for the foreseeable future. **Donations should still be sent to PMI.**

I really wish I could report that everything has been going well, but sometimes things don't work out the way we planned. It is with a lot of heartache that I've written this letter. Again, please keep us in your prayers.

In Christ,  
Joel