

Martin and Fran Russell working with



in Florence



From Piazzale Michelangelo, with Florence behind us.

25th March 2021

Why don't you bring me the sacrifices I desire?

Bring me your true and sincere thanks and show your

gratitude by keeping your promises to me, the Most High. Psalm 50 v 14

Dear friends at BH

Fran writes: Recently my daily devotion encouraged me to think about thankfulness and gratitude to the Lord. It explained that gratitude brings true honour to God and will open the door to prayer and worship. I have found this so helpful. There are so many things to thank the Lord for: His salvation, all His blessings, His sustenance, the beauty of His creation, His love and His forgiveness. It also changes our perspective on challenging problems or relationships, allowing us to see them more fully through eyes of love and mercy. Why not try including this in your daily time with the Lord and see what happens? What can you lose?

Martin's Health



*Breakfast time with Gioia
March 23rd*

Martin's health took a dive at the end of February. This is what he wrote on March 9th *"For a couple of weeks, I haven't been feeling great. I am tired with little energy, have no appetite, have abdominal pain, muscular pain and generally feel terrible. After talking with my rheumatologist, Carlotta, we decided to stop my medication and see if these symptoms were caused by the treatment. But after more than two weeks I am no better"*. We sent an urgent email out and know that many of you were praying specifically for this. Martin is feeling a bit better now, with more energy but still has achy legs, a general feeling of tiredness and the muscles in his hips and legs ache. Looking at him he appears well, with rosy cheeks, but his face is flushed because of the Vasculitis.

Please continue to pray for Martin, currently he is waiting to find out the next steps in the treatment for his vasculitis. Also pray for Carlotta, his rheumatologist for wisdom as she treats him.



Gioia, which means joy, (pronounced like lawyer, joyyer)

Gioia, our little Jack Russell puppy, came to live with us on February 21st. She is a delight and both of us are really enjoying her company. It has been a dream for Martin to have a dog, which thanks to Lockdown and working at home, has happened. She takes his mind off not feeling great, although he is having to get up a lot earlier as she wakes up at 6.30 a.m.

Gioia can now go out on a lead, but continues to go in the rucksack, when we go for longer walks.

Please give thanks for the joy she brings, but also pray that Martin will be able to build friendships with other dog owners as he takes Gioia out every day.

Agape Family Gathering Zoom Conference 18th – 19th February 2021



- **Pray and be inspired by God's word**, Including self-guided meditation and teaching.
- **Be re-envisioned by next steps for Agape Italia**, including the National Leadership Team's plans for the next five years.
- **Discover more about your part in our mission to Italy**, including how we can all play a part nationally.

Because of the pandemic this conference replaced Agape Italia's National Conference, which Fran was due to organise with a small team. Above are the goals we set for our times together.

We met, on the computer, over two days and had a mixture of teaching, prayer and discussion. The mornings were opportunities to spend time with the Lord. Martin prepared a video for one of the morning meditations from Exodus 18. He included questions and gave us a lot to think about, to help us with delegation!! We are currently analysing the evaluations plus praying about whether to continue with monthly meetings on Zoom to encourage and help the Agape Italia Staff team.

Give thanks that this was such a positive two days. Please pray with us as we consider these options with the rest of the National Leadership Team.

Student Ministry update

The student teams in Rome, Florence and Bologna have been working hard to connect with students in new ways, without meeting face to face, using computers and/or mobile phones.

One of the student team in Florence writes

"The Bologna and Florence teams have been doing an outreach project called "Practising English" where we get to help university students practice their conversational English using the computer or mobile phones to converse. It has been an awesome experience and we have gotten to talk to incredible students. Simona is the student I have talked to the most. She is a second-year student studying linguistics at the University of Florence. Since our first meeting she has shared her interest in other cultures and religions. She told me that she does not believe in God, but she would like to one day find a religion that she agrees with because she sees the psychological advantages of practicing a faith. We have already read some articles together about religion, psychology and even genetics. Talking to her is an absolute joy. We are meeting next week to discuss an article about different religions from a Christian perspective and I am excited to hear her opinion. Please pray for us as we meet together".

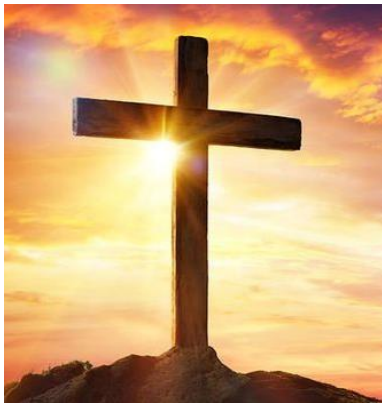
Give thanks for these new ways of meeting with students despite the pandemic and the opportunities that the Lord is providing. Please pray for all our student teams in Rome, Bologna and Florence, for perseverance and protection in this unusual time.

Prayer and opportunities

Both of us have been spending more time reading our bibles and praying, than a year ago. Although the arrival of Gioia has effected that a bit!!! Most days, we have a coffee together and pray for our days, world events and our friends and families. Here are some of the answers to prayer.

- Fran organises a weekly 90-minute Zoom call for her English-speaking international friends. Over the weeks she has prayed, out loud and with permission, for friends, with others listening. She has shared her story of how and why she became a Christian a couple of times and sent WhatsApp texts containing bible verses countless times to different friends, mostly married to Italians with Italian children and grandchildren. The Lord Jesus is at work giving Fran opportunities to show His love for her friends.
- Kylie recently asked Fran “what exactly is prayer?” A brilliant question. Fran was brought up as a Catholic so as a new Christian thought prayer was “The Our Father” and “The Hail Mary”, so rote prayers. She had no idea prayer was just talking to God so could relate to Kylie’s question and empathise. They had a long conversation.

Every one of us, in this pandemic are facing trials, but as Christians Martin and I know that Jesus is with us in all our trials and that gives us hope for the future and strength for today. We continue to pray regularly for our non-Christian family and friends. We are so far away from them, but praying for our friends and family is brilliant, because it means we can still be involved in their lives. Please will you join with us that Jesus will continue to soften their hearts and we will be aware of the opportunities that He give us to have spiritual conversations.



We are praying that this Easter we will be reminded afresh of the sacrifice that Jesus made for you and me. And that we will be able to speak of the hope we have to our non believing friends, family and neighbours, particularly as our world today feels very hopeless.

“For this is how God loved the world. He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life” John 3v16

With our love, as always,

Martin + Franxx

Coming Up

March 29 – April 5th We are on holiday at home, which will be fab. Please pray for good rest and fun together during this week free from all ministry responsibilities.

March 30th Our 36th wedding anniversary. Praise the Lord for pursuing us, as when we got married in 1985 we had no interest in who Jesus was.

April 6th – 9th These days are for us to concentrate on spending time with the Lord. As Agape Italia staff we are all taking these special days for spiritual refreshment. We know we are very blessed to be able to do this.

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