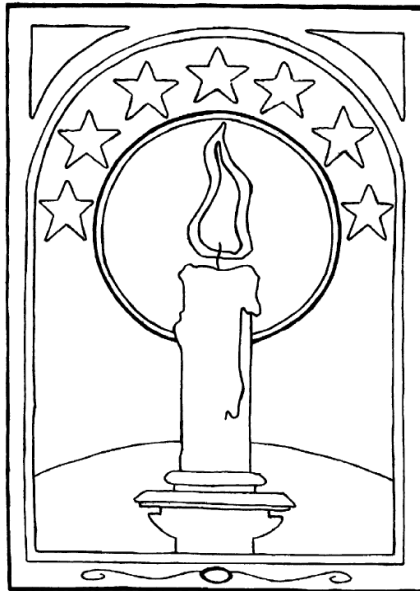


UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
WALDENSIAN FELLOWSHIP



Newsletter No. 73

November 2012

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Dear Friends,

It seems scarcely any time since the last edition. I am grateful to John Bremner and to Anthony Earl for providing news of the Synod and the Liceo. There have been many interesting articles in *Riforma*, but I have concentrated on some of the effects of the financial crisis on the Valleys and a unique event in Naples. You now have the opportunity to book for the Biennial Gathering, purchase calendars a little different from the description given last time and learn something of the Italians' visit to England next year, even arrange to meet up with them.

With best wishes for Peace this Christmas,

Kate Grand

Report on the Italian session of the 2012 Waldensian Synod

As you may know, I was not at Sinodo this year – for the first time since 1991! Here, in no particular order, are some of the highlights which I have gleaned from reading *Riforma*.

a. This year saw the end of Maria Bonafede's seven year stint as Moderadora. She has done a remarkable job – the first woman in the post, and, of course, in a country where only men are supposed to have leadership roles in the church, a very difficult task she had. She was given a huge ovation.

Eugenio Bernardini replaces her as Moderator. In his speech at the close of Sinodo he pointed to the following major areas of concern:

the economic crisis – both in terms of its effect on the Italian people and of its effects on the church; the balance between large scale diaconal work (old people's homes etc.), small scale local diaconal work (food banks etc.) and the life of local congregations, along with the Otto per Mille; pastoral care of the churches and how best to use the available ministry; 'being church together' – the continuing effect immigration is having on the life of the church; the need to encourage the young; equality between men and women. It seems a big enough agenda!

b. Big debates were held on the church's understanding of

marriage and family, the administration of an increasing annual Otto per Mille income (now around 12 million euro), the continuing need to balance the pastoral and business elements of the diaconal work, the increasing strength of Methodism in Italy, due to immigration (during the past year a new congregation was founded in rural eastern Italy).

c. There was a huge turn-out for the mid-week public meeting on the theme of the state of the economy and its effects on the young and the immigrants and how both these groups are to be integrated into Italian society.

d. During Sinodo, the death was announced of Cardinal Martini, for many years archbishop of Milan, a leading Biblical scholar, and an encourager of ecumenism. Sinodo stood in silence for a minute in thanksgiving for his contribution to ecclesiastical life in Italy.

e. William Jourdan was consecrated pastor at the opening service. Another candidate failed to pass the test and will have to wait another year.

John S. Bremner

News from the Liceo

Building on her research for an exhibition on the school's history, earlier this year Lucetta Geymonat began writing the history of the Liceo. In less than six months she has produced a deep and challenging work of 50,000 words which has been translated into English by Anthony Earl and the text is now with the publishers. Anthony is very grateful to members of the Fellowship who have read chapters and suggested modifications. We look forward to the book being published with great anticipation.

This November Anthony was once more busy at the Liceo for a 3 week of spoken English with the pupils. This year's themes, requested by the Liceo, were:

Year 1 (age 13): English food and diet

Year 2 (age 14): Family and culture (including the Olympics) and Cambridge

Year 3 (age 15): Shakespeare's sonnets

Year 4 (age 16): The novel in its different aspects

Year 5 (age 17-18): The socio-economic context of 19th century Literature (Dickens)

He also asked one of the pupils to write a short article for the Newsletter which appears below.

Kate Grand

My Experiences of England

In the last three years, I've been to England six times in total. Three times to Folkestone, once to Cambridge and twice to London. They have all been wonderful experiences, which helped me to improve my English and my own knowledge very much indeed. However, if I had to choose the best ones, they would definitely be the last two, when I went to London.

In December 2011 I was sent by my school to London with a friend of mine to attend Eltham College for two weeks. It was just great. We had the chance to stay in a lovely family, where we tasted some delicious Scottish food. During the week we attended our classes and then we had a lot of spare time to visit the capital. I really fell in love with London, where I visited some of the important museums. I had also the time to go to the Royal Festival Hall for a wonderful concert directed by Vladimir Ashkenazy and to the Coliseum for the *Nutcracker*. I went back home very sadly, hoping to come back sometime.

When I started to think about what I could do during the summer this year, I immediately thought I could go to London!

I did not want to merely visit the city, though; I would have liked to find a way to practise my English and improve it. The way, which I found with the invaluable help of a friend of my parents, turned out to be one of the best experiences I've ever had in my life.

I was on a placement at Wesley's Chapel. During the nine weeks I spent there, I worked with astonishing people from whom I definitely learned something more than some English. In fact, I eventually started to penetrate British culture. I started to notice the funny differences between a Welsh accent and a Yorkshire one, to get the British humour and to learn some basic rhyming slang. Furthermore, I had all the time to visit the city (even if I know it will take me a long time to visit it all) and I was amazed by the marvellous ambience of London during the Olympic Games. It was all fantastic and now I am already sure what I am going to do next summer.

Jean David Eynard

Jean David, who is Italian, although his ancestors were Swiss, is in the Quarto Anno (equivalent to our Year 12). This November he was also joint winner of the poetry recitation competition for which the Fellowship gives a prize. (The prize was shared with the three girls who acted the witches' scene in Macbeth.) In addition to the normal range of subjects, he is especially interested in Music and Philosophy, and is learning to play the organ.

Anthony Earl

Concerns in the Valleys

Since the last Newsletter much has happened in the Valleys as a result of public spending cuts. There is concern at the reductions in local government in the mountain areas, with the loss of some *comuni* and mayors, and plans for reorganization of regional government with larger administrative areas and all that that implies; fear of losing the court in Pinerolo; the loss of the Torre Pellice -Pinerolo railway service; and fear for the future of the Waldensian hospitals under '*drastic reorganization*'.

It was only in 2004 that the Waldensians reluctantly handed over their hospitals to the state because they could no longer afford to run them themselves. Now the '*Balduzzi decree*' to reform the Italian national health service has been approved by Parliament. Demonstrations have taken place outside the regional council in Turin against the dismantling of services at the Waldensian hospital there and local traders closed their shutters in solidarity with the protesters. By 9th November this year the geriatric department at Torre Pellice had been closed and the eight beds transferred to Pinerolo. In Pomaretto they were thinking of transferring the oncology beds. The Region was talking of 'conversion' of the hospitals in the Valleys, meaning they would become little more than rest homes, if that.

As I was writing today (22nd November) this week's *Riforma* plopped through my letterbox with the news that there is talk of eventual closure of the 'valdesi' in Pomaretto and Torre Pellice. If this happened, what would happen to those who live higher up the valley, in Prali for example? The mayor of Prali is still hopeful that Pomaretto will not close, as there would be too many patients and users for Pinerolo to

absorb, but closure would be disastrous for those with mobility problems, and the population is an ageing one. Everyone should be ready to mobilize for a protest together, citizens, administrations and authorities, not just the 4 mayors.

On 26th November a motion against closure will be on the agenda of the Council of Mountain Communities.

In Torre the mayor had more reassuring information. At a meeting of mayors in the local health authority (Asl) area, the reorganisation of the health districts was discussed. Three districts will be reduced to one for Pinerolo and the Pellice, Chisone and Germanasca Valleys. The Asl director was prepared to have minuted that he has taken it upon himself to maintain the two hospitals, as long as there are no contra-indications from higher authorities.

As for the Turin hospital, renowned for its excellence, by 31st December, according to the pamphlet put out by the hospital's defence committee, outpatients' services, breast screening and surgery, gynaecology, orthopaedics, plastic surgery and neurology departments will close and all other activities cease soon afterwards.

Such is the concern that Eugenio Bernardini, the new Moderator, wrote to President Napolitano on 16th November appealing to him to use his powers to keep the 3 hospitals open so that their services can continue. The closure or 'ridimensionamento drastico' of the three Waldensian hospitals in Piedmont "betray the spirit and letter of the regional law of 2004" in which it is affirmed that "considering the high social value of the activity undertaken [the Region] guarantees to maintain the levels of service provided by the hospitals of the Waldensian Hospitals Commission, and, by acquiring them, promotes their integration into the regional health system."... "thus breaking an agreement that the regional institutions had made with both the Tavola Valdese and the citizens to whom these hospitals give valued service." Although aware of the urgent measures required by the current financial crisis, "as believers and as citizens," concludes the Moderator, "we cannot withdraw from our vocation to work for justice and put ourselves at the service of those who are suffering and have need of healing and support."

As for the train service, all pleas and proposals have fallen on deaf ears. It looks as though the proposed new high speed Turin-Lyon rail link will go ahead, despite soaring costs (from €12 billion in 2002 to the

latest estimates of €26 billion) and grave doubts on the part of the French Treasury as to its profitability, as freight volume has also fallen and the existing line is nowhere near its full capacity. Meanwhile a French company has introduced a new Turin-Lyon coach service which is quicker than the current train!

The bus service to Pinerolo continues to draw protests: journey times in comparison with the train; higher fares; unreliable service – especially buses running earlier, or later, than the timetable, meaning fear of missing connections and more time spent waiting in the cold, breathing in exhaust fumes, instead of stepping out of the waiting room as the train appears; overcrowding and danger of injury when travelling at speed on certain sections; lack of space for pushchairs and bicycles; and ticketing. With the new timetable from 9th December there will only be buses and the tickets will be valid for both bus companies, but just recently Trenitalia sold the Pro Loco in Luserna San Giovanni lots of the old tickets for them to sell, which will soon no longer be valid! They too are not best pleased.

Back in October passengers were treated to a special 'Freccia' (Arrow) service, for one day only, on the bus. Everything went swimmingly with a steward on each bus and low level access for bikes and buggies, but "Why?" people asked and "At what cost?"

Yet if the TP - Pinerolo line ever does re-open it will be under new management, having been put out to tender. In December new cross Turin train services will also be introduced, with apparently little thought as to how they will be served by buses, trams and underground, within the city, as few of them will stop at Porta Nuova. There will not even be a smooth connection with the much vaunted high speed trains which depart from there.

What a way to run a railway! And we complain about the British system!

The Voice of Silence

'There are things in a silence you never expected.' This quotation from an Italian song captures something of the evening of November 9th in Naples which saw the Christian churches there go out on the streets to express in silence (cf. Psalm 37: 7) their prayer for a city as difficult as Naples.

Catholic, Orthodox and Protestants, as a single church, marched through the city centre to the Galleria Umberto to give a message of hope and confidence. They preached the need to mend one's ways and

the possibility of forgiveness and regaining dignity in the light of the Gospel to the gangster fringe, those involved in organised crime, who have such a damaging effect on the city and beyond.

The event, initiated by a few pastors, found immediate and enthusiastic response from both Catholics and Orthodox alike. For the first time, without privileges, outside of places of worship, without denominational symbols or banners of any sort, everyone mingling together and united, the Christians of Naples announced the Gospel to the city in a time of crisis.

Over 1,000 people crowded round the platform in the Galleria, where the Christian leaders were gathered, together with representatives of other religions (Muslims, Buddhists, Baha'i -- the Jews sent a message of support as it was their Sabbath).

The Beatitudes from Matthew's gospel were read out, one by one, and the ministers each gave a brief message. After the benediction they all departed in the hope that this would not be an isolated occurrence but the beginning of a journey together along the road of witness to an ever more relevant Gospel.

'Valli Nostre' calendar for 2013

No photographs of the Valleys this time! Claudiana have decided 2013 will be devoted to the works of Paolo Paschetto (12th February 1889 Torre Pellice – 9th March 1963 Turin)

Paschetto was born into a Waldensian family, but as an adult became a Baptist. In 1889 the family moved to Rome when his father, a Baptist preacher, was called to teach there. Paschetto studied at the Istituto di Belle Arti in Rome, exhibited work while still a student and taught there from 1914 to 1948, the year he won the competition to design the emblem of the Italian Republic. He also designed stamps. The Baptist Church in Via Passalacqua in Turin and the Waldensian Church in Piazza Cavour in Rome are examples of his work, which was inspired by art nouveau and early Christian motifs. He used a variety of materials. From 1915 he spent 8 years working intermittently on paintings of landscapes, people, costumes and traditions in the Valleys, many of which are in TP on permanent exhibition in the museum. A shame we missed them!

The Assembly of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe was held in Florence 20- 26 September 2012. A report by Fleur Houston will appear in the December edition of Reform.

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Revd John Rye

Recently I heard from Margaret Brumfitt of Ormskirk who informed me that Revd John Rye had died in September, following a period of illness. He had not been very well for some time. John, along with his wife, Gwynneth, was an active member of the Fellowship for many years. Both took part in a number of trips to Italy, joined the biennial gatherings and also provided hospitality to Italians in their home. John showed Italians round London and even learned Italian at one time.

I remember him on one of our visits to the Valleys and Turin, when Massimo welcomed us to the newly refurbished church hall in Corso Vittorio Emanuele II. John's hearing was no longer so acute and he had been sitting at the back while Massimo was talking about the church. We heard about the English-speaking church too. He came up to me at the end, having noticed me taking notes. "You will be doing a full report on this for the Newsletter, won't you?" he asked. He did not want to miss a thing.

John will be much missed. We send our love and condolences to Gwynneth.

Ruth Cowhig

We congratulate Ruth on celebrating her 97th birthday this autumn.

Membership Subscriptions

The subscription rate is £15 for three years. A note is enclosed for those members whose subscriptions have expired. The membership records are held by the Treasurer, George Morton, who should be informed of any change of address.

Copy for the next edition should be sent, preferably as an email attachment, to kategrand@tiscali.co.uk **by the end of May 2013**. Items may also be sent by post to the address inside the front cover.

Biennial Gathering at Hinsley Hall

Wednesday 3rd – Friday 5th April 2013

Once again, the Gathering will provide the opportunity to meet old friends and make new ones. This venue has proved popular and of course, it does provide the type of accommodation that we require and is readily accessible by public transport. All are welcome whether or not you were able to be part of the visit to Italy.

We intend to have a guest from the Waldensian Church in Italy who will be able to provide an insight into some of the challenges facing the Church at this time. A Booking Form is included with this Newsletter.

I am particularly looking forward to being there and seeing everyone after my prolonged period of absence. Do try and encourage other friends to join us. I am certain they will not be disappointed.

Yvonne Jones

2013 VISIT OF ITALIANS

Monday 8th July – Wednesday 17th July

Next July, Massimo Long is to lead a Group Visit to the Yorkshire and North Western Synods. The group is expected to be 15 - 20 people. They will arrive in Leeds and spend four nights at The Community of the Resurrection in Mirfield, West Yorkshire and then go on to The URC Windermere Centre for the rest of the time.

In both venues we hope that they will be able to meet up with URC churches in addition to having visits in the local area.

If you or any of your members would like to meet them (some of whom will speak English), then do not hesitate to contact me. I am sure you will find it a valuable and interesting experience which would be much appreciated by our visitors.

Yvonne Jones

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