

THE CHURCH IN VICENZA

As told by Renato Marini

(August 2002)

Translated by Barbara Bird

The history of the Church in Vicenza starts in the beginning of the fifties, when an American base that would become the command headquarters of SETAF, was established in Vicenza. Among the numerous servicemen from the USA who came to live in Vicenza were several mormons. It is for this reason that in the sixties the Swiss Mission, which included Italy, opened branches in our beautiful nation where there were American bases like Vicenza and Naples.

The First Member from Vicenza

During these years there was even a baptism, of which, however, there is no written record. When -in the early eighties- I met president Clinton Gillespie, then president of the Rome Mission, he told me about a brother with a name that started with the letter B I believe, who had been baptized while he was president of the military branch in Vicenza. I have been unable to find him and from the Church I have not received any kind of document containing his name. Perhaps he is part of the long list of unknown members.

With the birth of the Italian Mission, whose headquarters were in Florence (1966), missionaries arrived as well, but none of them were sent to Vicenza: larger cities were chosen such as Turin, Milan, Padova, etc.

I was the second inhabitant of Vicenza to become a Mormon. I met the missionaries in Florence while living there from August 1971 until April 1972. Missionaries Balzotti and Gardner knocked on the door of the apartment where I lived with seven other students and I began attending the church located at Piazza Stazione, 2. The first of May, 1972, when I returned to live in Vicenza, there were neither missionaries nor the Church in the city. There were only the American military members of the Church, who met on the base. The nearest church was in Padova.



Vicenza: Villa Rotonda Palladiana

Arrival of the First Missionaries

The missionaries from the Milan Italy Mission, under the presidency of Dan C. Jorgensen, arrived in Vicenza to open the city to the preaching of the Gospel in November of 1973.

The first location used as a meetinghouse was three small rooms on the third floor of an old building on Via Pescherie Vecchie. This arrangement, however, was unacceptable, and the missionaries searched for another location and rented (in February of 1974) three larger rooms on the ground floor of an old apartment building on Via Apolloni, next to the new Courthouse.

The American branch was still partially functioning, but there were only a few members who met in the nondenominational chapel on the military base. Vicenza was not yet a branch, but a group dependant upon the Padova Branch, and it was led by a missionary. At that time I was the Branch President of the Padova Branch and therefore kept track of the statistics of the Italian members in Vicenza.

The First Baptisms in Vicenza

The first baptisms of the missionaries in Vicenza were two sisters: Sister Alba Trevisan,

about 70 years of age, and Sister Isabella Fioretti, about 18 years of age, were baptized in a plastic font in the apartment on Via Pescherie Vecchie, in the presence of some American members and Brother Renato Marini. Every once in a while I, as Padova Branch President, but resident of Vicenza, went to church on Via Apolloni. On March 30th, 1974 Mariano Marini and Mirco Canaglia were baptized in the rented meetinghouse of Padova. They were the first male members from Vicenza. Other baptisms followed; Brother Giovanni Stragliotto, resident of Bassano, baptized in 1973 in Padova began attending the Vicenza Branch. Sister Rosetta De Monte arrived from England (1974) and Sister Eliza Rego from Brazil (1974).

Opening of the Italy Padova Mission

In July of 1975 the Padova Italy Mission was opened (initially the Church had planned on making Bologna the mission headquarters, geographically more centrally-located, but several things convinced the European headquarters in Frankfurt to choose Padova). The first president of the Padova Mission was John A. Trincerini and in August I was called as counselor in the presidency of the Venetian District, with President Tommaso Tanca.

The first Italian Branch President

In my journal I noted that on August 18th, 1975 we visited the American branch in Vicenza to call a new branch president. The Italian branch had a missionary as president until August 11th, 1975 when the group became a branch and Mariano Marini was called as the first local president. On the same date the Venetian District was divided into the Veneto-Emilia District (Presidency: Tanca, Marini, and Arias) and the Friuli-Trentino District (Presidency: Austin, Panzera, and Demartin). At the next conference, on November 30th, 1975, the presidency of the Veneto-Emilia District was changed with the calling of Sergio Zicari, Renato Marini, and Giuseppe Pascali.

New location in Olmo di Creazzo

By request of President Grincerini, the missionaries began searching for another building and on June 20th,

1977 the Vicenza Branches (both the Italian and the American) moved into a small two-story house in Olmo di Creazzo on Via Siena, 12.

On March 9th, 1978, a few months before leaving, President Grincerini re-divided the District into two new districts: the Padova District (President Roberto Arienti, Mariano Marini counselor) and the Bologna District. Renato Marini was called to preside over the Vicenza Branch and he chose Brothers Mirco Canaglia and Virginio Carraio as counselors..

Publications

In 1979 the Presidency of the Vicenza Branch published two booklets for internal use. One was directed to families and was entitled "*La Dottrina del Sacerdozio*" (The Doctrine of the Priesthood) and was intended to explain the various aspects of the priesthood. The other was entitled "*Comunicazioni piú efficaci*" (Better Communication) and was directed to leaders, to explain some basic principles of leadership in the Church. The Elders Quorum, under the leadership of President Alessandro Faresin, published an internal newsletter entitled *Vicenza SUG* (Vicenza LDS) for two years (1979 - 1980) that contained cultural articles from Brothers and Sisters and Church announcements.

In 1980, Brother Giovanni Stragliotto published a book "*La mia testimonianza - Perché un cattolico diventa mormone*" (My Testimony - Why a Catholic becomes Mormon) to explain his conversion. The book circulated within the Church and among friends.

Change of Leadership

At the conference of April 27th, 1980, Brother Renato Marini was released to be called as President of the Padova District, with Giovanni Stragliotto and Luigi Piloni as counselors. In Vicenza Brother Fedele Pinna was called as Branch President and remained in that calling only one and a half years, then called as president of the Padova Branch. In his place Brother Giovanni Evolani, a member newly arrived from Turin, was called, and later Brother Giovanni Stragliotto.

New Location in Viale San Lazzaro

The building in Olmo was abandoned in 1984 and both branches moved to a smaller location on Viale San Lazzaro, 50, in the city. Here it was certainly easier to reach by the members without cars.

The history of the branch between 1983 and 1989 could be better told by others since I was living in Voghera where I served as President of the Alessandria Branch (2 years) and president of the Piedmont-Liguria District (4 years).

The Venice Stake

On October 15th, 1985 when the Apostle David B. Haight came to organize the Venice Stake, the Italian and American branches were unified with Giovanni Stragliotto as bishop, Mariano Marini and Fedele Pinna as counselors.

New Location in Viale Trento

The united branches no longer fit in the meetinghouse on Viale San Lazzaro and in 1986 a new location was rented on Viale Trento, 246, which was then renovated under the direction of the Regional Office and Brother Pinna. The new meetinghouse had a chapel that seated 100 and a total of 11 classrooms. The Vicenza ward had an attendance of about 80 people in Sacrament meeting.

After a few years language problems convinced Bishop Stragliotto and President Luttmann to separate the two language groups, though keeping the unity of the ward. All of the classes were held in different rooms for the Italians and Americans while Sacrament Meeting was held together. The hymns were sung in both languages and the talks were translated from the pulpit. Bishop Stragliotto wrote a book of memories entitled “*Stratiotesi*” in which he testifies of the strangeness of this situation. Then even the Sacrament Meeting was divided between the Americans and Italians and the bishop was the only thing they still had in common.

In the end, in August of 1992, the ward was closed and the Italian and American branches went back to being separated groups in the Church. Mariano Marini was called again as branch president, with Renato Marini and Vincenzo Balestra as counselors.

On June 12, 1994 the branch presidency was changed again and Brother Sergio Giolitto from the Verona Ward was called to preside over the Vicenza Branch. After a few months Brother Romano Matteazzi was called with Brothers Massimo Forin and Michael Southworth as counselors. Besides the long presidency of Brother Stragliotto (8 years, from 1984 until 1992), all the other branch presidents served for only a couple of years. President Matteazzi remained the leader of the Branch until May 2000, over five and a half years. He was then substituted by Brother Massimo Fornin, with Brothers Renato Marini and Stefano Malandrino as counselors.

The Bassano Branch

In 1997 the branch was divided to create first the group and later the branch of Bassano, with Sebastiano Barresi as president. In May 1999 Brother Pinna was called to preside over the Bassano Branch.

A Vicentian Presides Over the American Branch

In the month of June, 2002, Brother Renato Marini was released as counselor in the presidency of the Italian branch to be called as president of the American Branch. Since 1992 the two branches have shared the same building, alternating time schedules in the morning and afternoon.

In 2002 there was an average of 45-48 people attending the Italian branch, while the American branch oscillates between 25 and 60 people, depending on the number of Mormon American families assigned to the military base.

In November 2003 Vicenza will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the arrival of the first missionaries and the opening of the branch.

List of Branch Presidents

from 1975 to 2002.

Mariano Marini	1975/1978
Renato Marini	1978/1980
Fedele Pinna	1980/1982
Giovanni Evolani	1982/1984
Giovanni Stragliotto	1984/1992
Mariano Marini	1992/1994
Sergio Giolitto	1994/1994
Romano Matteazzi	1994/2000
Massimo Forin	2000/today