

MISSIONARY WORK AMONG ITALIANS IN GERMANY, 1963 - 1964

by Marcellus Snow

On March 18, 1963, seventeen months into my thirty-month South German Mission, President Blythe M. Gardner called me into his office (I was then the mission secretary) and mentioned the possibility of missionary work among Italians living in Germany. At the time the majority of them were young single males employed in construction and other jobs related to Germany's booming economy. I responded enthusiastically, and Pres. Gardner obtained permission to begin on a "part-time, experimental" basis from Pres. Theodore M. Burton, the European Mission President.

Pres. Gardner asked me to form an Italian district consisting of myself and Elders Lorin Busselberg and Phillip Cardon.

We quickly acquired Italian language material and began translating and memorizing the "screening discussion," a standard proselyting tool at the time.

"Nothing can stop us now," I wrote in my journal on March 26. On March 28 we hit the street in downtown Stuttgart (Koenigsstrasse), approaching Italians and speaking to them in what must have been very poor Italian.

On March 29 I noted that I had "never worked harder on my mission or enjoyed the work more."

On June 8 I was released as mission secretary to work full-time with Italians. A new Italian district was formed including Elders Busselberg, Cardon, Dean Castle, Robert Palmer, Derek Kaufmann, and myself as district leader.

On July 1 our district was reorganized and included Elders Fife and Longhurst.

We quickly found that our most promising contacts lived in barracks - type accommodations provided by the firms that employed them as construction workers. Guards hired by the firms sometimes refused us entry but at other times were friendly. Typically we would make our first contact in these barracks and invite or bring investigators to evening "MGMs" (multiple group meetings), a proselyting technique of the time in which investigators heard evening lessons in chapels rather than at home. These were quite successful with Italian contacts, whose "home environment" at the time was quite often noisy and raucous with little privacy.

By July 13 we had 25 investigators at an MGM, and on June 26 our first convert under the program, Fratello Leone, was baptized.

On July 21 I wrote, "We are on the brink of something great and receive help from above more than ever before."

Brother Dionisio was baptized on July 23, and Brother Riciardi on August 3 (the latter was the first convert taught by my companion and me.)

On Sundays I recall that we had a Sunday School class in Italian and our investigators either went home after that or attended one or more of the German-language meetings.

All levels of Church leadership were informed of, and responded positively to, the program during the summer: President Henry D. Moyle of the First Presidency; President Burton once again; and President David O. McKay, touring Wales, who said the program should be expanded to include all German-speaking missions.

Brother Romano was baptized on August 30; Brothers Dattilo, Bozzalan, De Lorenzo, and

Scaccia on September 13.

Elders Dobbs and William Nelson joined the district on September 17. Elder Jay Bodine joined about that time.

On Oct. 12, one thousand hymn books in Italian were ready for distribution. Various elders, including myself, had helped to translate about 30 hymns and did most of the work of designing, printing, and binding the booklets. Four of us formed an Italian District/Zone quartet and sang at conferences on occasion.

Brothers Cosentina, Sgamabati, Cannelli, and Teta were baptized during the last three months of 1963. Bro. Felotico was baptized on January 17, 1964.

My journal shows that Brother Larcher (who must have been baptized earlier, outside of our program) helped me and other elders in translating basic tracts such as "*The Plan of Salvation*," "*A Voice from Heaven*," and "*After Baptism, What?*"

Not all "guest workers" in Germany were Italian, of course. Many were from Spain, Greece, Yugoslavia, and elsewhere. Elder Nelson and I found and baptized Brother and Sister Lopez from Spain. Elder Nelson spoke Spanish (he was from Phoenix) and I had a few weeks of eighth-grade Spanish, so we pooled our meager linguistic resources to teach and baptize this family. We concurred with President Gardner, however, that the time was not yet ripe for formal proselyting in other languages within our mission.

During all the above activities the Swiss Mission had been busy with Italian-language work in the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino. In particular it supervised the translation and publication of the *Book of Mormon* in Italian, the first such effort in over 100 years. The translator was Paola Calvino, the daughter of a Waldensian minister in Italy.

On January 29, 1964, President Gardner sent

Elder Cardon and me to Mrs. Calvino's home in Basel to help complete the index to the new translation. The body of the text had already been translated. Elders Orto and Fischio of the Swiss Mission helped us.

While in Switzerland, Elders Cardon and I consulted with President Russon at the mission home in Zurich, and then took the train to Lugano, Ticino and spent a day or two with the elders there,

including Elder Camberlang, the district leader. It was pleasant to tract door-to-door in Italian.

Brothers Vulcano and Rozza were baptized on March 6. I baptized Brother Politi on March 27.

On March 24 Pres. Gardner picked up several hundred copies of the new Italian *Book of Mormon* from the printer in Basel (ten thousand were printed overall).

I left the mission field on April 16, 1964 and returned home. At that time there was still no Italian Mission, no LDS services or chapels in Italy (aside from those serving U.S. armed forces), and no proselyting in Italy. In the South German Mission, as I recall, there was at the time of my release an Italian Zone with six missionaries in each of three districts: Stuttgart, Ludwigsburg, and Esslingen.

During the 1967-68 school year my wife and I lived in Bologna, Italy, where I spent a year in a graduate program in international relations at the Bologna campus of the School of Advanced International Studies of Johns Hopkins University. We drive about 30 miles to Modena each Sunday for services in the local branch there. We attended other branches while traveling in Italy.

I share the gratitude of all those in the Italian District and Zone during 1963-64 in the South German mission for the chance to play a part in preparing for the re-opening of the Italian Mission during the mid-1960s.