

# deFelice Italy Ministry Update

January 28, 2010

## Ashley's permission to stay in Italy --- all praise to God

[www.marcodefelice.org](http://www.marcodefelice.org)

### Brief Summary:

---- a few years ago, God brought Ashley into our lives as a true fellow laborer in the work of God. However, it proved impossible to obtain a visa for her to stay long term in Italy. God has opened a closed door, and provided that permission for her in way which shows his power and ability to do the impossible. Keep reading, and you'll hear how He did it, and some of what He is doing through her partnership in ministry, plus how you can participate. -----

### The Details

God has done what was humanly impossible to be done.

In 2006, though we didn't know her, Ashley came to Italy for three weeks to help us with an English club for our church here.

God used that time to speak to her heart, and give her a hunger to grow.

Just weeks after returning to the USA, she wrote and asked if she could return for discipleship. She came for a three month discipleship period (Sept-Dec 2006) Each day she had hours of directed Bible reading, and one day a week of teaching time with us.

During that time, we recognized her heart and gifting, and asked her to consider working with us. After several months, she decided to commit to one year of ministry with us.

So, from about June 2007 through June 2008, she ministered with us. Since laws allow Americans to be here three months as a tourist, she left the

country every three months and returned the same day in order to renew her tourist visa for another three months.

At the end of that year, we discovered that a clause in the law states that one must be gone three months every six month period. So, we realized that she could no longer stay as she had.

So, she went back to the USA for a three-month period, with the new understanding that she would need to spend three months in the USA for every three months she spent in Italy.

During that summer, 2008, Ashley came to realize that she had not been trusting God with her future, instead seeking to plan and control the direction of her life. She realized that her life and her future were not hers to control and that God was calling her to make an open-ended commitment to the ministry here, rather than one year at a time. When she returned in September, she shared with us that she was committed to ministry with us until God directed otherwise.

So, for the second year, she spent three months in the USA; three months in Italy, and then the cycle was repeated.

Although this was better than nothing, we all quickly began to realize that this was very hard on Ashley, as well as the fact that it greatly reduced what she was able to accomplish in the ministry here.

We began searching diligently for every possibility for her to obtain a visa to stay in Italy without needing to go back and forth to the USA. Hours of research on Italian government websites made it clear that we simply did not have the qualifications to be able to obtain a visa for Ashley.

We prayed that God would open the door, but it almost seemed useless to pray, because we simply did not have the qualifications for the only doors that existed. But, we prayed anyway.

Since when is God limited by that which is possible?

Ashley returned again this past September 2009, and quickly got into ministry. Shortly after she arrived we discovered that the Italian government had announced a new law on September 1 as part of its economic stimulus package which was designed to bring in additional revenue from people with unregistered foreign workers. The law allows people who had foreign household help to legalize that help. However, the law had very specific requirements.

As we looked over the requirements, it became clear that this law had been almost perfectly written for our situation. It required a period of 90 days, from April 1 to June 30, in which the worker was with the family. Ashley's three month stint in Italy was precisely during that required time period! She had traveled with us in the USA, and returned with us to Italy on April 2, and then had left for the USA on June 25. Also, the law required a certain level of income, and we were just barely over that level. Since the law wasn't announced until September 1, and the qualifications regarded the situation months before that, it was clear that if we fit, it was the work of God!

We were so close to meeting the qualifications that we decided it was worth the effort and the money, more than \$800 fees, to apply in the hopes that a visa might be granted. We turned in the paperwork by the required deadline of September 30. At that point, it was simply a question of waiting to see what would happen.

Finally, on January 11 we had an appointment at the police department to present our documentation. They had failed to list one form which we needed, and another form needed a legal translation. They rescheduled us for January 27. I obtained the missing form, and made another trip to town to go to the courthouse to legalize the trans-

lation of the other document.

Yesterday, January 27, we returned to the police department to hand in the final document. Based on what we read in the instructions, we were supposed to give them the documents, and then they would let us know the outcome when the documents had been examined.

Public offices in Italy are very different than in the USA. Usually, the room is crowded, there are four or five chairs for about 50 people, there is no bathroom, no water fountain, and one must stand often for several hours. Naturally, many people are nervous and edgy, and this means that the clerks are often that way too.

On our visit on January 11, we dealt with an extremely kind lady who was very helpful. Yesterday, in God's providence, the same lady waited on us again. We knew that the fact that Ashley had left on June 25 instead of June 30 might be a major problem. We were not prepared when the lady told us that our request was invalid because Ashley was not here on April 1. I explained, truthfully, that she had been traveling with us in the USA, and had helped us on our trip. The lady had the power to accept or reject our explanation. God granted us favor in her eyes, and she accepted our reasoning, and so wrote on our form that we met the qualifications.

She then gave us a pack of documents which she told us to fill out and then send in, and then she said that we needed to go to the health department to obtain a health card for Ashley, because she is now in the national health care, and then we needed to go to obtain an identity card for her. Somewhat perplexed, I asked when would we find out about her status. The lady smiled and said that unless her fingerprints reveal that she is not the person she says she is, then she is approved! Since Ashley's fingerprints are indeed hers, that means that she is approved, from what we understand!

So, for the many of you who have been praying for us regarding this issue, join us in giving praise to God for his mighty work in opening this door

for us.

As the three of us reflected at lunch together, we realized that if we had not had our ministry time in the USA in exactly that period, allowing Ashley to travel with us and return with us, she would have been disqualified. If the dates they asked for had been anything other than April 1 to June 30, she would not have been qualified. If they had set a level of income just slightly higher than what it was, or if the dollar had been as low last year as it is this year, we would not have been qualified. In fact, detail after detail of the law makes it so very clear that this is a work of God. It was humanly impossible for us to obtain a visa, but God opened the door which did not exist.

We rejoice in this wonderful news! However even more so, we thank God for having strengthened our faith. If she would have been denied the visa, we would have accepted that as being God's perfect will. In fact, we were very prepared for that answer. But God worked things out in such a way that it was absolutely clear that Ashley was granted permission to stay not because of human efforts, but because of God sovereignly working out the details. So in this, He has once again reminded us clearly that He can do anything, and is not limited by that which is humanly possible.

## English course

Now let me backtrack and fill you in on some other details. In late November, Ashley was frustrated that she had very few contacts with unbelieving Italians. We had a free English course which we examined and which seemed like it would work to use as the basis for teaching an English class. So, in early December, just to see what kind of response we would get, I put a notice on a local Internet bulletin board announcing a free English course.

We received a handful of responses, and on December 20 three families came to a meeting in our home to hear about the course. I made a conscious decision not to talk about God, wanting to introduce Him gradually once the course was started.

However, as we more closely examined the material, we realized that though it had many positive aspects, it just did not fit our needs. We have a series of needs, which no existing course, of which we were aware, satisfied. We wanted a course which focused on learning to understand and speak, learning the grammar through usage and not through studying grammar tables. We wanted a course which was free, so that we could freely share it with others. We wanted a course which was based on sound linguistic principles and practices which we had learned in linguistics courses, which many existing courses do not follow. So, we began designing an entire course from scratch.

God provided a group of wonderful and precious coworkers in the United States who have a heart to help us with this immense project. In fact, the term "help us" does not convey the right idea. As we get more organized, these helpers will be doing the majority of the work.

But we needed students. I recognize that I had sinned in failing to talk openly about God in that first organizational meeting. I repented, and we once again advertised the course, and waited.

On January 10, we had another organizational meeting with about 20 nonbelievers present. I very clearly talked about God, and afterwards we had about an hour and a half of bold evangelization time.

To make a long story short, we had such a strong response, many of those people asking if their friends could come as well, that the course is divided into two groups, in order to fit everyone into our home. We have approximately 50 people, 25 per night, of whom about 35 are new contacts. This past Monday night was our first lesson, and it went wonderfully. Afterwards, we had some excellent conversations with various students, and many took an evangelistic tract which I had offered to them. Tuesday nights' lesson was canceled because of snow, and we will make it up this coming Tuesday. The students are extremely happy with the course, and we are being inundated with requests from their friends if they too

can attend. We have said yes thus far, but we are actually full to the gills in terms of space. What a wonderful problem!

Let me tie all of this in with Ashley. This course would be absolutely impossible for me to even consider doing on my own. Sherrie and I are swamped with ministry, and there's just no time to add-in such a major outreach. And yet, this is being greatly used of God to give us open doors into the lives of many new people. Ashley is ideally prepared and qualified to work on this course. So, she is a provision from God which is allowing us this form of outreach.

That is in addition to many other valuable ministries which Ashley does. She does the vast majority of the work on our websites. My sermon website continues to be heavily used, with more than 70,000 visits in the past year, (more than 200 per day) with statistics showing a very high percentage of visitors downloading sermons. Our evangelistic site is much newer and smaller, but we're starting to get more than 40 visits per day. In addition, Ashley is very involved in discipleship and evangelism, as well as helping in many other practical areas of the ministry.

But really, much more than what she does, the key factor is who she is. Christ is visible in her, and shines through her. That is what really matters. Plus, the three of us are of one mind and one heart.

So, please, join us in thanking God for having provided a visa for her, when it seemed humanly impossible for that to happen.

Pray also with us that God will save many of the people we are starting to know through the English course. We are having good spiritual conversations each time we see them. We are organizing some special evangelistic events to which to invite them. Pray that God would greatly glorify himself through the salvation of people.

Another special prayer need: This new permission for Ashley to stay has some significant costs involved. For instance, we must pay approximately \$4000 per year as employer contributions for her

health care and pension fund in the Italian system. We purchased a car for her use, and it has incurred significant expenses in terms of purchase, insurance and repair, as well as ongoing operating expenses. In addition, of course she has living expenses.

Ashley's total support and ministry levels are only \$25,000 per year. If you are aware of typical missionary support levels, you'll know that that is extremely low. Yet she only has a fraction of that coming in. I do not have final figures, but the last I saw she is under \$5000 per year of support, which means she would ideally need \$20,000 a year of additional support. Right now, we are covering her expenses, mostly out of our own pockets, but this is eating into our savings and is unsustainable in the long term. Therefore, please join us in praying that God would provide people who would participate in God's work in this part of his kingdom by supporting Ashley. Support can be given through Vera Vita Ministries, with information on the website at [www.veravitaministries.org](http://www.veravitaministries.org).

These are intensely busy days for us. Praise God, all of these new contacts are providing hours of additional ministry time each week, in addition to the English course, in addition to contact with believers throughout Italy, in addition to the sermons and local pastoral care here. Pray that we would keep our eyes daily upon Jesus Christ, resting in Him, and having peace in accomplishing that which we are able to accomplish, and leaving that which we cannot.

Thank you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, for your partnership with us through your prayers, giving, encouragement, and love! May our Lord be glorified through all of us, as we await to see Him in his glory.

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Photos on following page



Part of a family who attends



Some of the younger helpers



The class enjoys the evening



Who's tall and who is short?



The class is active and fast-moving



Adriano's brother (middle) is attending, with his wife.