

8 August 2026, Feast of St. Dominic

Dear Parishioners of St. Mary's and St. Wenceslaus parishes,

Due to an unforeseen health situation impacting my mobility, I write to you from Southern Italy rather than speaking to you in person at this weekend's Masses, as part of the diocesan **Mission Coop Plan (MCP)**.

When the Diocese of Davenport in February invited me to present to you the **Rachel's Vineyard Italy Mission**, I gratefully accepted, but wondered: what interest Iowa could have in Italy? The Missions Office told me of your parishes' active pro-life commitment, including the prayerful presence long conducted at the local abortion clinic. (My own prolife vocation was born 40 years ago from similar experiences.)

Then I discovered the pioneering role of Italian **Fr. Samuel Mazzucchelli, OP** in evangelizing your area and much of the Midwest. The words of this zealous Dominican who arrived to the "new world" 200 years ago fittingly describe the passion with which today, in the "old world" of Italy, we carry out our Mission:

"Let us wake up then, open our eyes in apostolic charity, and if we are called, set out for any place where the work is great and difficult."

Rachel's Vineyard, an apostolate offering Church-approved retreats for healing after abortion, does precisely this. We have strong Dominican roots in Italy: Dominican sisters opened their house to us for our first retreats, and our most faithful and generous priest collaborator is Fr. Cristiano, a Brazilian Dominican missioned to Italy 30 years ago.

The **1-page Summary of our Mission** (found on the website of the Diocese of Davenport, Mission Coop page, "2026 Missions Selected") paints the big picture of our apostolate.

But it's **the words of those we serve** that will help you see the human face of this unique Mission, which I humbly ask you to support by making a **Mission Coop Plan (MCP) donation today** or in the upcoming weeks:

ALBA (a southern Italian living in the north) wrote in her first email of the human hurt and the spiritual suffering abortion can bring:

"I know what I did is horrendous, and I did it 3 times... From the moment I did it the first time, my life ended. I carry a huge sense of despair inside me, and it's suffocating me. For the longest time it's like I didn't want to see what I'd done, but the truth is, I'm carrying death inside of me. I can't find the words to tell you what I feel, I find myself totally disgusting, and I figure this is just my punishment for what I did in such an irresponsible way. There is not a crumb of love left in my life. My heart swings between total desperation and being frozen solid. I can't love anyone anymore. I have no life in me anymore."

From this type of raw pain and spiritual alienation, the women, men and couples we companion over months or years, move in faith and hope from a very dark place - their personal "calvary" and "tomb" - to a place of light and life, resurrection and reconciliation - with God and the Church, with those who

abandoned or pressured them into that fateful choice, and reconciliation with their child who, as a member of God's Holy Innocents, surely intercedes for his or her parents' conversion and sanctification.

Signing up for the 3-day *Rachel's Vineyard Retreat* requires enormous courage. Our ministry team across Italy, who know first-hand the fear and panic that can set in even when you know you need healing, are trained to be faithful companions on that journey.

LAURA (from Rome) was one such participant. Following a chaotic life including 2 abortions, after her *Rachel's Vineyard* retreat, Laura grew into an active practice of her Catholic faith, both through her parish and beyond. I'll never forget one of her emails received years later:

"Can you imagine?" she said, "Me happy, and me living chastity? After how I used to live? I never would have imagined it was possible!"

ENZO and GESSICA, a cohabitating couple from the Adriatic coast, participated in the *Rachel's Vineyard* retreat together. They already had a 3 yr-old, and had aborted their second child because they just didn't feel "ready". Afterwards, the couple was falling apart. Gessica recalls:

"I'd thought the Church was filled with nerds, losers and bigots. I was so wrong. Here I found a real community.... And during this process I finally saw Enzo's vulnerability. He asked me forgiveness. I can't hold this against him anymore."

Healing their abortion experience was a breakthrough, and 2 years later, encouraged by us and guided by their local pastor, the couple married in the Church. They had come to realize their need for God.

Finally, I'd like you to hear **ANNA from Milan**, who had aborted while working in Australia:

"I'm writing to thank you for the wonderful work you're carrying out. I also thank those who prayed for me during the retreat. Thanks to Rachel's Vineyard, JESUS has worked healing and liberation in my life and in the life of my family.... My heart's deep desire is to help other women like me who've touched bottom, who've been to Hades and wonder if they can come back. I so desire that they, too, might return to life by experiencing God's love, His infinite Mercy, healing and liberation... I want many unborn children, abandoned and buried in darkness, to be resurrected in the hearts of their moms and to be led by Jesus into Paradise."

Please pray for the Church in Italy.

Pray for our Mission – to this day the only one of its kind in that country.

And please take home some **Prayer Cards** (the "*Good Shepherd*" and the "*Prodigal Son*" have slightly different prayers, so by all means take both and share them with fellow Christians).

Let us together pray that like those who've known the touch of God's Mercy and the power of His liberation through the ***Rachel's Vineyard Italy Mission***, we, too, might become Apostles of Life and Apostles of Mercy to a world that so desperately needs both.

Our Italian ministry team sends their grateful greetings and prays God's blessing upon you!

Monika Rodman Montanaro, MDiv, Founder and Director, *Rachel's Vineyard Italy Mission*