

Family Faith

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To this day centuries-old cathedrals are some of the tallest structures in Italy. Ancient ruins boast of past societies while medieval houses lie nestled along winding streets. Building codes prohibit modern high-rises from being constructed, and the rural Tuscan landscape is legally protected against overdevelopment. That's because Italian citizens are committed to preserving their history. If the renowned Renaissance man Michelangelo returned to earth today, Italians hope he would easily recognize his homeland.

Church members throughout Italy are interested in preserving much more than architecture and landscape. They aim to preserve faith across generations. Like

many Church members around the world, Italian Latter-day Saints are pioneers in creating multiple-generation families joined in gospel covenants. These Church members face old traditions and pervasive secularism in the surrounding culture, but they focus on the Savior and try to build faith that will thrive in the hearts of their posterity.

Revering Family

One of the first components in building family faith is the courage to *begin* a family. Marco and Raffaella Ferrini of the Firenze Second Branch, Florence Italy District, dated each other before serving missions. Soon after returning home, they both felt impressed in the temple that they should marry soon. "In Italy it's more common to get married in your 30s," Marco says. Some friends and relatives asked them, "Why are you getting married so young?"





“I knew that if I raised my children in the gospel, they would have answers to their questions.”

—Anna Ferrini

relationship made a positive impact on their children and their daughter-in-law. “When I first set foot in their home, it really hit me that they have a good family life,” Raffaella says. “They don’t yell at each other.

Opposite page: Giulia, Marco, Raffaella, Lorenzo, Alessio, Anna, and Bruno Ferrini stand strong in the faith.

The couple credits the influence of Marco’s parents, Anna and Bruno, for helping them value marriage. When Anna joined the Church in 1968, there were few Church members in Italy. After praying about her decision, she married Bruno, a man who respected her beliefs and allowed her to teach their children the gospel. “I never worried about marrying a Mormon because of the great respect Anna and I had for each other,” Bruno says.

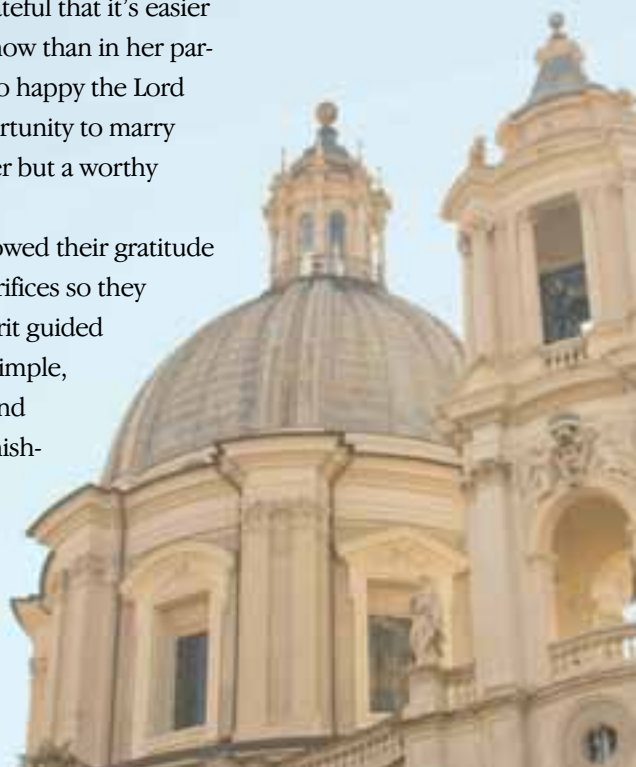
Although Anna felt pained because she couldn’t offer her children all the blessings of an eternal family, she says, “I knew my husband was a good man and eventually everything would fall into place.” In the meantime she taught her sons, Marco and Alessio, to make the Savior the center of their lives and to value the family.

Eventually Bruno joined the Church. Today he is president of the Firenze Second Branch. But during the 29 years that he was not interested in the Church, he and Anna still worked to have a happy marriage. Their loving

They are calm and nice to each other. I really wanted that.”

Raffaella also wanted a temple marriage. She says, “To marry in the temple is a good goal,” even though it may be harder to achieve in countries with fewer Church members. “Satan tries to convince us to make wrong decisions, but when we have a good goal clearly set in our minds, Heavenly Father will help us overcome everything so we can reach that goal.” She is grateful that it’s easier to meet Latter-day Saints now than in her parents’ generation. She’s also happy the Lord blessed her with the opportunity to marry “not just a Church member but a worthy priesthood holder.”

Raffaella and Marco showed their gratitude to the Lord by making sacrifices so they could marry when the Spirit guided them to. They planned a simple, inexpensive celebration, and Marco decided to delay finishing his university studies. “Everything is so expensive here that it’s hard to do more than one thing





at once—study, work, and have a family,” he says. Financial concerns prompt most Italians to finish school and establish careers before marriage, “but our main desire was to start our family,” Marco says. He realized that only three things were vitally necessary to be able to do so: a job, a place to live, and the faith to move forward. At first “I didn’t get a very good job, but it was enough,” Marco says. “Anytime you have to make a hard decision, you just have to jump in. You go by faith and try your best,” trusting that needed blessings will come. Eventually he was blessed with a better-paying job in the tourist industry, thanks to the foreign languages he learned on his mission. He also has a testimony of paying tithing because his young family has never been in need.

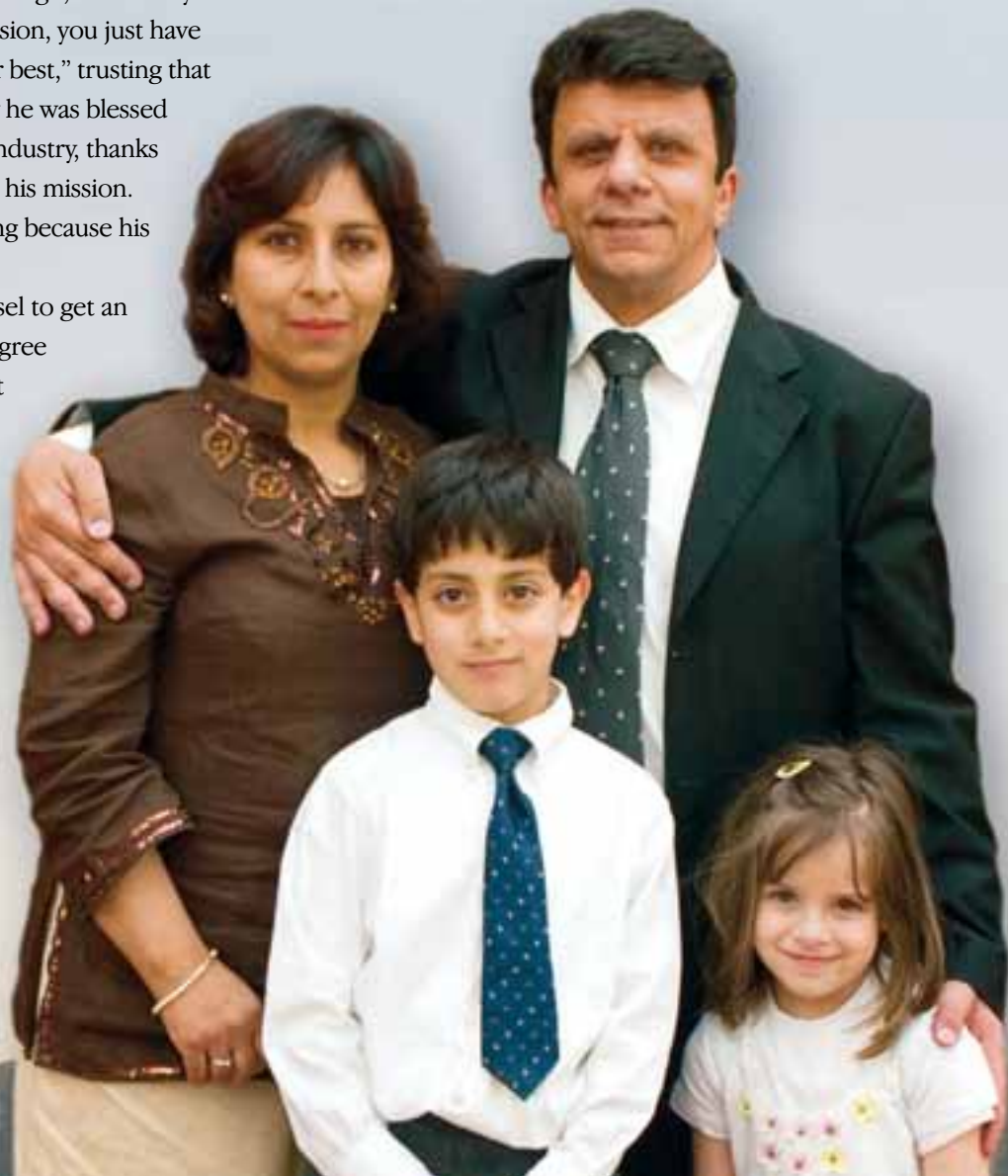
Marco values Church leaders’ counsel to get an education, and he plans to earn his degree when his children are a little older. But for now, “I feel the Spirit telling me that it’s important for me to be with my family. And since my two children, Giulia and Lorenzo, have been born, I haven’t regretted a thing.”

“We don’t have much money,” Raffaella says, “but we are happy.” They are grateful to participate in the plan of happiness and teach its truths to the next generation—the third generation in their family to receive gospel blessings.

United in Purpose

Spiritual unity can be a crucial ingredient in building solid family faith, says Piero Sonaglia of the Rome Italy Stake. “Being united in purpose can be a source of strength for all families,” but it is especially a blessing when that purpose is to “move together toward Jesus Christ.” This is his family’s most important goal.

Piero didn’t always have such priorities. At age 15 he left the Church and didn’t look back until becoming a father and dealing with his own father’s near-fatal heart attack. These incidents sparked memories of gospel teachings he had learned as a child. “I knew very clearly that I had to



repent and put my life in order,” he says. He also knew that “such an important and drastic change” would affect his family. His parents had divorced, partly because of religious differences, and he wanted his own family to be united.

Piero’s wife, Carla, grew up practicing a different religion from his and had attended church each Sunday as a child. “But I would come home feeling more confused,” she says. For her, religion had been a matter of tradition rather than something to shape her life. Carla hungered for something more. She says, “I felt a strong desire to pray to Heavenly Father on my own, using my own words” instead of written prayers. Her heartfelt, prayerful relationship with the Lord prepared her to embrace the restored gospel when Piero returned to activity.

As parents now united in faith, Piero and Carla try to prepare their sons, Ilario and Mattia, against temptation—starting now, while they are young. “We read scriptures every night and have family home evening,” Carla says. “Our sons are happy to participate. We go to church. We pray together. We go to the temple.” Regular temple attendance for Piero and Carla is not a small feat when the nearest temples are in Switzerland and Spain.

“We try to recognize every moment as an opportunity to teach,” Piero adds. “At this stage in their lives, our young sons are especially learning to obey their parents.” Piero hopes this will help them learn to obey Heavenly Father, arming them with the strength and testimony necessary to remain



faithful throughout their teenage years and beyond. He knows—and wants his children to know—that lasting happiness is found only in obedience to God.

Like Piero, Andrea Rondinelli of the Rome Italy Stake found the gospel after a life-changing event, the death of his father. “I realized it could not end like that,” he says. He sensed that there must be life beyond the grave and purpose to life and death. He had encountered the Church 15 years earlier when his sisters were baptized. After his father’s death he sought out the missionaries and was baptized 15 days later.

Soon he received his patriarchal blessing. In it the Lord promised him an eternal companion. “While I was looking for her, I prayed a lot,” he says. He wanted a wife who would share a common spiritual purpose with him, and he ended one engagement when his fiancée didn’t want to be sealed in the temple. “I did everything I could to be ready for

Opposite page: Andrea Rondinelli prayed for an eternal family. His wife, Mariela, and their children, Daniele and Valentina, are answers to his prayers. Above: Piero and Carla Sonaglia teach the gospel to their sons, Ilario and Mattia.



Lorenzo and Ilaria Mariani make sacrifices so they can teach their children, Gioele and Davide, how to keep an eternal perspective.

the moment I would meet my wife,” he says. In answer to one of his prayers, Andrea had an impression that someday he would have a son. This experience helped him be patient until he met Mariela.

Mariela found the gospel in Colombia at age 11. After serving a mission in her native country, she visited Italy. She was surprised—and a little distressed—to feel the Spirit prompting her to stay permanently. “Everything was OK back in Colombia,” she says. “I had a job. I was involved in the Church. I had the opportunity to study. But I felt in my heart that I was here for a purpose, that my role was here.”

Andrea is grateful for that prompting. He and Mariela met two years after his baptism, and today they enjoy the kind of marriage they waited for—sealed in the temple, equally yoked in faith. They continue to build unity by “spending time together, like going on walks,” Mariela says.


Family home evening is also key. “Our son’s baptism involved the whole family,” Andrea says. For months they spent family home evening learning how to prepare for baptism and confirmation and “studying the principles that Daniele was going to embrace. We were all involved together, and we felt very much prepared for the occasion.” Whenever they hold family home evening, the children are involved. “Our daughter, Valentina, leads the music,” Andrea says. He smiles. “She’s very good.” Daniele chooses the hymns and sometimes helps prepare the lessons. “Every Monday is always a beautiful experience for all

of our family members,” Andrea says. Such experiences strengthen the spiritual foundation upon which their children and grandchildren may build.

Living with Joy

A third component in building family faith is to live with joy, says Lorenzo Mariani of the Pisa Branch, Florence Italy District. Lorenzo is a counselor in the district presidency while his wife, Ilaria, is a stay-at-home mother who serves in Young Women. They have a lot to do, and they try to accomplish it with a smile. They believe their visible happiness can help mold their children’s attitudes toward the gospel. “When we do something for the Church, we show a good example by not appearing stressed and by having a good attitude,” Lorenzo says. “Children can tell if you do something with joy or just because it’s a duty.”

“I think a lot every day about how to instill faith in my children,” Ilaria says. She hopes her constant loving care will show her sons, Gioele and Davide, the joy of families and that relationships



are more important than money. She says, “The forces threatening the family in Italy include people not wanting to get married or not having more than one child so they can pay for their child to have lots of privileges.” She acknowledges that other children have more possessions than hers, “but these are less essential” than taking the time to teach her children eternal truths.

Ilaria sometimes feels lonely when so many women are socializing in the workplace, but she prays for help and feels the Spirit filling her with happiness and strength. “I am also blessed with a lot of sisters in the Church who love me,” she says. Sometimes when she prays for help, a sister in the branch calls and offers support.

As for extended family support, Ilaria and Lorenzo look forward to the day their posterity will have multiple generations of faithful forebears to learn from and emulate. “We pray for our posterity,” Lorenzo says. As a second-generation Church member, “I feel a big responsibility on my shoulders to be the strong link in the chain.”

Lorenzo and Ilaria feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the privilege of being pioneers—some of the first in their family to raise children with gospel light. Lorenzo’s mother was the first to join the Church in his family, and Ilaria learned about the Church from her aunt. “The gospel

helps strengthen our marriage a lot,” Lorenzo says. It “gives us the eternal perspective of our family. We try to make the right choice in the eternal perspective instead of the mortal perspective.” These choices are the substance of strong links, connecting one faithful generation to the next.

“Sometimes when I hear stories in general conference about the speaker’s great-grandparents being pioneers, crossing the plains, I get a little jealous,” Ilaria admits. It’s hard for her to imagine having a whole family tree of people who sacrificed for the gospel. But she and Lorenzo are encouraged by the Church growth they have seen in their country. They are grateful for the first missionaries who planted seeds there, and they know a greater harvest is coming.

Ilaria smiles, envisioning that day. “I know that someday someone will be reading Great-Grandma Ilaria’s journal.” Family stories of faith are beginning with her today.

Preparing Their Posterity

While Italian citizens preserve ancient monuments and Renaissance charm, Italian Latter-day Saints also *make* history. They create family history of eternal significance by keeping the commandments and teaching their children to do the same. They look forward to the Savior’s return and hope their posterity will be among His disciples.

To accomplish this they are striving to be true disciples themselves. They prove that it’s possible to endure, to be diligent, to be happy, and to establish faithful families united in temple covenants. By word and example they teach the rising generation what it means to nurture faith in Jesus Christ. ■