



# Reformation Christian Ministries

## A Love Story and More

October-November 2004

***For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16***

Many people fail to recognize that the love of God for His people is the motivating factor for everything truly Christian, including the love for a woman. Though many things called "love" come naturally to mankind, men give them to others before they are given to God, thus making them idols. Love for God must be first, and when it is, he will give other people to you for you to show His love. Waiting on God's timing for love is difficult in a world that demands others be loved before God. Christ's loving obedience in His incarnation, His life on this earth and especially in the cross brought the glory of His resurrection (2 Cor. 5:14-15). This is the example for all things in our life, including marriage. The love story that follows is one such example of God's blessings through patience.

The story begins in 1974 in two different parts of the world. I was converted to Christ after the death of my baby boy several years earlier and began following the ministry of a recently converted Roman Catholic priest by the name of Franco Maggiotto in Italy. We forgot about Italy after 1978 when we went to Suriname, South America for 8½ years of missionary service. Meanwhile, in 1974 over in Italy, a young Italian couple, Giorgio and Sabrina Modolo, had a child named Andrea. **Little did any of us know what God's love would do over the course of the next 30 years to bring about this love story.**

The Modolos moved to Canada in 1975. Giorgio's communist sympathies got him into some discussions with Christians that resulted in the conversion and baptism of his family in early 1976 at the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod in Calgary, Alberta. God's love had brought spiritual resurrection to the Modolo family and in the process developed a lasting friendship with Rudy and Sharilyn Poettcker, who attended the same church.



Baptism of Giorgio (left) and Andrea (right) and Sabrina (behind pastor) 1976 in Calgary, Alberta.

That friendship played a key role in this love story even though Giorgio took his family back to Italy in 1981.

While in Italy the Modolos maintained their strongly reformed

faith, but had no Reformed church to attend. At one point for about ten years they associated with a somewhat Reformed baptist church which eventually they could no longer conscientiously attend. They longed to see a truly Reformed church start in their area and spoke frequently with the Poettckers about this.



(L-R) Sharilyn and Rudy Poettcker, Andrea, Giorgio and Sabrina Modolo. Calgary, Alberta 1977.

Meanwhile, the church in Calgary that Rudy Poettcker was now pastoring began receiving newsletters from RCM. Through a chain of events starting with the 1992 death of their son, Micah, the Poettckers joined RCM and went to minister in Suriname in 1994 supported somewhat by the Modolos. **A second son's death became instrumental in this drawing together.** The following year, the Lord brought Franco Maggiotto and RCM together resulting in a new RCM field in Italy.

When the Poettckers visited the Modolos in Italy during Christmas 1997, the relationship with Franco Maggiotto and RCM became the topic of discussion with Giorgio and Rudy. Because



Andrea Modolo and "Uncle" Rudy Poettcker - Italy 1997

Franco's work was known in Italy, and also because of a past conflict between Giorgio's pastor and Franco, Giorgio was uncomfortable with his good friend Rudy's involvement with RCM because of its connection with Franco. Nevertheless, God providentially used this irritation as you will soon see.

Meanwhile, the next year, my wife and I visited Italy to get better acquainted with Franco's ministry. It was during this time that we briefly met Piera Emili. As our involvement in Italy grew and was reported in our newsletters, Giorgio's increasing concerns about Franco were passed on to me by Rudy Poettcker and eventually led to direct discussions between Giorgio, his pastor, and me by email. A resolution was impossible at that time resulting in no communication between Giorgio and I for the next four years.

After the Modolo's left that church, God softened Giorgio enough that Rudy felt I might be able make contact again with him. Because of Christ's reconciling ministry between God and man, my great desire was to promote reconciliation between Giorgio and me and ultimately Franco and Giorgio. Consequently, the Lord put on our minds to visit the Modolos in conjunction with our November 2003 EduTour of Italy. While peacemaking was one objective, we also wanted to make acquaintances with the Modolos who had played such an important part in the lives of our colleagues: the Poettckers. The Modolos agreed to our visit, though told us later they felt quite uneasy about it at first.

As Giorgio and I visited by phone to plan our upcoming visit, I discovered that they had grave concerns for their oldest son, Andrea. He was completing law school and frustrated by the lack of eligible women in Italy who loved the Lord as he did. I knew there were Reformed women in some of Franco's churches with the same problem, so **I also began to see that God could use this trip not only for the purpose of peace-making, but also match making.** A few pieces of this providential puzzle were coming together.

While Franco served as our guide on this tour, he mentioned repeatedly during lectures and discussions that standing strong in the

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Fields: Albania, Italy, Russia, U.K., Congo, Zambia, and Suriname.

Director of Missions: G. W. Donnan, Minister

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faith in Italy led constantly to persecution. The most recent example was this brilliant young woman, Piera, who God had strategically placed as a full-time teacher and part-time city council member in Alpignano.

Piera was an accomplished woman of 32 who had risen in her teaching profession to such a level that she was chosen to be the spokesperson for the Piedmont province school system (for which she worked) when it was selected as one of the top school systems in Europe. Simultaneous to all of this, with no beau in sight, she responded to the attention of a well-respected non-Christian university professor who very much wanted to marry her. In retrospect, she knew this could not work, but pressures caused her to allow this social relationship to develop. But his proposal of marriage came with conditions: she must disassociate herself from this Protestant Church she attended because its pastor, Franco Maggiotto, was a "dangerous man." When she refused, her suitor vindictively determined to sabotage her employment. That was where things stood when Franco left to be tour-guide.

After the tour, Piera came to Franco's house the night before our departure to visit the Modolos (irresistible providence in retrospect). She explained that the relationship was off, her job had been sabotaged and that she had resigned in order to avoid being fired. She had stood for her faith in the midst of great social and economic pressure. My wife and I were very impressed with her faith in the face of such opposition, particularly since she had been waiting for many years to find a marriage partner of like precious faith. Little did we or she know what God had spent the last 29 years preparing for her, using the means of two Americans who were sitting in the same room with her at that precise moment. "So, why not take a few pictures," I said to myself, "just in case she might be a match for Andrea." We said nothing of this to Franco or Piera.

The next day, we left by train across northern Italy to meet the Modolos. We arrived on a Friday, spent Saturday touring Venice, and Sunday at church and touring Vittorio Veneto. Despite their initial reservations, the love of Christ broke down the human barriers. Most of my time was spent with Giorgio, with Andrea tagging respectfully but very willingly along. Just the mere openness of godly conversation attracted him. We showed pictures of our "just finished" tour with Franco and explained his ministry (with peace-making hopes). As we came to the pictures of Piera at Franco's house, I explained her recent plight. Sabrina exclaimed to her son, "Andrea, come look at Piera, she is bea-u-ti-ful." (He had not been paying much attention to the pictures, and gave the impression then of only being courteous to his mother by looking.)

On Sunday evening, prior to leaving after growing quickly close to Giorgio and Sabrina, we had a heart to heart discussion over dinner during which Giorgio admitted that he had misjudged me because of my relationship with Franco. After getting to know me and my love for the Lord and the Poettckers, he said he would be open to learning more about Franco and perhaps changing his opinion of him as well. The grace and good providence of God was clearly evident. The love of God was breaking through. There were signs of resurrection of brotherly relationships.

My wife left Monday. My flight to Albania left on Tuesday. So, it was arranged that I spend the day with Andrea where he lived—about 50 miles away in Padova. It was during this time with Andrea that he shared the longings of his heart and desires for both a calling of occupation (he was unsettled about the field of law) as well as that of finding a girl he could marry who believed as he did. He also explained that he had foolishly succumbed to considering a relationship with a local Italian non-believing girl. He saw his error before it was too late. In faith, he found he had no option but to trust in the Lord and he broke off the relationship with her, yet his anxieties about the future remained. (He and Piera discovered through their talks that this similar type experience through which God put them was intended to build their trust and patience in Him and to prepare them for each other, which time was soon to come.)

Because of these frustrations, he had corresponded with his Uncle Rudy in Suriname who offered to have him come to Suriname



Piera Emilia at Franco's house.  
Picture shown to Modolos Nov. 2003.

to teach in the RCM school for a year or two. Was a wife more easily found outside of Italy? Was God leading him away from Italy? During our walking talks, he explained his obligation to earn his own way in life. He felt that Suriname would not provide this and for that reason he could not go there. Consequently, I offered him an opportunity to spend a few months with us in the U.S. to help him clear his head before returning to Italy. I also told him that there were Christian women in Italy who believed as he did and could not find a godly man. He was clearly interested. I agreed to help him make the contacts, through Franco and an American studying in Milan. As capable and committed as he was to Reformation, it seemed he should not be lost to Italy. During our time, we prayed together and shed a few tears together and enjoyed each other's company for that day. Andrea said that his time with me had been most helpful and encouraging to him but that because of his final law school exams, he would not be able to make his decisions about America until many weeks later. Finally, on January 5, 2004, I received the following email from Andrea [my clarifying comments in brackets]:

*"Dear Geoffrey: I know that you have maybe patiently waited a response from me. Now here I am. Two weeks ago I wrote to uncle Rudy my decision not to go to Suriname and instead I expressed to him the desire to take up your offer [to visit the U.S.], after visiting [the American in Milan] and Franco. In the meanwhile I wrote to Franco asking him to give me the chance to meet Piera.*

*On Saturday the 27th... I went to Milan... The day after we moved to Torino [Turin] and attended church. There Franco introduced me to Piera and we sat together during the service; I told her you and Nancy told me something about her and we have talked together in a low voice during the service, in which, I must admit, I was not so interested as I was about Piera....*

*Briefly, at the end of the evening I asked her to meet together the day after and she immediately accepted with a smile; so on Monday we spent the whole afternoon talking together and we understood that there was already something going on between the two of us and we realized that we were put together by the Lord. Therefore we are now officially engaged.*

*I am afraid to tell you that my desire to come to Florida has now gone...I am sure you can understand why; Nancy was right: Piera is a very sweet godly woman...I think that I should concentrate on my future with her and quickly find a job in order to be able to marry her as soon as possible.*

*This doesn't mean that I am not interested on the things of the Lord any more, but, you know, I have waited for a long time for these days that now it is painful for me to get separated from Piera for a while. ...I am going to Alpignano once every two weeks to visit Piera in the weekend.*

*I am sorry Geoffrey, but it seems to me that now God has clearly shown me the path I must follow and this is exactly the answer to my prayers...I don't want to let you down Geoffrey, but I hope you will understand that I won't take up your offer: I have a lot of things to do here and a renewed strength given by God to face new duties.*

***Now I must thank you for your prayers and your photos; they made possible the match between Piera and me!*** I would also like to ask your prayers on us, specially because I want to understand where I can serve the Lord best... Please pray for wise decisions. A special hug to Nancy. Thank you for loving me so much. Andrea

It would be 10 more months of incredible trials before they could be wed but that time only furthered the clarity and resolve that God's love for them had brought them together, even through times of impatience. Though there were a few short emails from Andrea, I mainly kept informed through Franco as to how things were going. We were encouraged in June by the wedding of an elderly couple who were part of our Italy tour, and continued posting prayer notices for Andrea and Piera. Finally, with Andrea working 12 hours a day as an apprentice criminal attorney and Piera gaining some part-time employment teaching, they were able to afford their own place, and set their marriage for two weeks after the apartment was secured. We received the following email on October 17, 2004.

*Dear Uncle and Aunt [Poettckers] and Geoffrey and Nancy:*

*I am happy to announce that by the grace of God, Piera and I are going to marry on October, the 30th. In the last year, my life has completely changed in an unexpected way! On last December, as you know, I was ready to leave Italy for a while and go to Donnan's house but when I met Piera I changed my mind about what I was going to do. I have looked for a job in Turin for many months without finding it until the teacher who helped me to write my [law school] dissertation called a colleague of his in Turin and recommended me, saying that **because of my reformed faith I certainly was a good and honest fellow** [strange for the law profession in Italy]. Now I am a practicing criminal lawyer, but I still am not sure that this is my real*



### **A Love Story** (continued from page 2)

vocation; in the meanwhile I am taking every Saturday theological classes with Franco Maggiotto and helping him in the service in the little church of Alpignano. I am realizing that there's room for a Christian lawyer, because everyone is a sinner who makes mistakes and ought to be punished, but the ones you [help as] a Christian lawyer can also know the mercy of God and His forgiveness.

Now that I am working full time we are economically able to pay a rent for a small house near Torino, so we have decided to get married. God has given to me a nice and godly woman and I am honoured to have been chosen by God to love and serve Piera after many years of long wait. We will marry in the town hall and this is going to be a great opportunity to witness our reformed faith to the city. We are thankful to our Lord for His merciful answer to our and your prayers.

Even if we know that you [Poettckers] cannot leave Suriname to come here, the two of you are officially invited to our wedding day. May God continue to bless you! Geoffrey and Nancy; the two of you are officially invited too! Andrea

Because of God's love reaching out to a communist sympathizer from Italy, God brought the Poettckers and Modolos together. Because of the loss of two sons, the Donnans and Poettckers came together in RCM. Because of the love of Christ and a desire to see the resurrection life of Christ brought to dark Italy, RCM and Franco Maggiotto came together. As Christ's love worked itself out through the relationships of these four families, God brought a young Christian man (Andrea) and a young Christian woman (Piera) together **to find love with each other because of their love for Christ**. Two separate events over 30 years ago guided by God's loving providence led to a chain of events that brought about this love story.

They not only are the product of God's ministry through your prayers, but are symbolic of the new generation of reformers beginning in Italy. But the love story is not over. See *Modolo Wedding* at the RCM Articles section of [www.reformation.edu](http://www.reformation.edu) for the rest of the story.

**I now introduce to you Mr. & Mrs. Andrea Modolo,**  
**affectionately known to us all now as Andrea & Piera.**



*Andrea and Piera Modolo - Wedding Day Oct. 30, 2004*

*Piera's wedding dress was voluntarily made by Aurora Maggiotto.  
Cash wedding gifts may be sent to RCM and marked "Italy - Special Gift".*

 *Geoffrey Donnan*