

MY EXPERIENCE IN MRA AND UWP

Adriano Costa, Caldogno, Italy 15 November 2022.

This text needs to be read after my report “Frank Buchman’s work in Italy”, because I have nothing to add to what I wrote there about my experience. In this text there are many negative remarks about my experience, because I want to be truthful about it and it was a mixed experience.

When I was 18 I read “Ideas have legs” and was fascinated. I am a bit of a dreamer and at that time (and still now), I longed for a world inspired by the teachings of Jesus. I knew my life did not match those teachings. The book convinced me to start by putting it in order. The following Summer I accompanied my English mother, who needed to return to the UK for a few weeks. On our way by train we stopped at Montreux and visited Mountain house for a few hours. That visit hooked me and I spent the following Summer holiday from University (one month), at Caux using my knowledge of English and French. I did the same in the following summers. During the meetings, two each day in the big hall, I and three other Italian students who were proficient in English took turns doing a simultaneous translation of the speeches from a cabin, which was sent by radio to the delegations of workers from the Milan area who spent a week there. We translated at meals and helped to arrange the daily programme of the Italian delegates. In 1952 I met at Caux Paolo Marchetti who had just started working full time with MRA. I never knew in detail about his decision; only few days ago, reading the chronology of his work with MRA, I found that he had been invited. That made a fundamental difference between his position and mine, when later I in turn went full time; I went on my own decision. Paolo shared our job but was also taken in other activities which I did not know. We were always good friends, though later I envied the attitude towards him of the senior members of the team working in Italy, who were grooming him for leadership.

During terms at Bologna University I worked with other people who had been to Caux. In my report about MRA in Italy I give more details about this activity and about the activity of MRA in Italy in which I took part. In the Spring of 1951 we decided to present in Bologna the Italian translation of “The World Rebuilt”, which had just been published. We organized a public meeting in a theatre and asked the international team of full timers in Milan to send one or two speakers. I did most of the organizing. The two most authoritative men in Milan came; they were quite proficient in Italian. Their condition was that they choose the day according to their other commitments. I asked them not to choose the days just before the oral part of the most important exam in my course of studies and the day of the exam itself. They chose the day of the exam and in the previous days the other members of the Bologna team left me with the final arrangements for the presentation of the book, so I had to neglect my studies. My exam was a poor show. Having done a very good written part, the examiner gave me mediocre marks, but suggested that I refuse them and repeat the oral part in the Autumn. I was conditioned by the experience of other students I knew, who by delaying their exams ended up not taking a degree. On hindsight I should have had a moment of guidance: Instead I decided to accept the poor marks, which affected my marks at the end of my course. After the exam I found that the two men from Milan had left a debt at the hotel, which I paid from my meagre resources, and had complained about my absence. I was so furious that I decided not to go to Caux that Summer. I went on a rock climbing course with my brother and did some more mountaineering.

By Autumn the fury had boiled over. I joined the team in Bologna, had the experience with Cardinal Lercaro which I have written about in my report, and returned to Caux the following Summer and the following one (1953) as well. In February 1954 I took my degree. At that time junior civil engineers could not find a job in Italy, but a young colleague of my father’s was back from a stage with Ove Arup & partners in London, a famous civil engineering firm. He gave me a letter of presentation, I went to London, a cousin of my mother’s offered me hospitality in her flat and the firm gave me a job with a modest salary, but just enough to make a living. At the same time I was planning to study for a British degree, so that I could join the Institute of Civil Engineers. I started looking for a flat to share with an MRA friend. My mother and I decided to meet in Caux where she brought me my Winter clothing and I asked my boss for two weeks holiday. In Caux I acted as verger of the Catholic chapel.

One Sunday before Mass I asked the priest for confession. During confession the priest asked me: "Are you sure you are following your vocation?" I took the question as an indication that God wanted me to work full-time in MRA, though I wondered if he meant that I should consider taking holy orders. After Mass and after closing the chapel I rushed to Mountain House to try and see the priest, but I was told that he had left immediately after Mass. I asked two trusted senior friends, who independently encouraged me to follow my vocation.

I went back to London and offered one month of work before resigning. My boss was sorry that I was leaving and said he would take me again if I changed my mind. In the same Summer Patricia Tremellen, a granddaughter of Austin Reed, the well-known men's clothing retailer, went full-time with MRA. At the end of the Summer conference she was offered the choice to join a team in Europe. Though she was proficient in French, she had guidance to choose Italy. We worked a lot together in the following years. Only in the Spring of 1966, over eleven years later, I made up my mind to propose to her, though I fell in love with her the first time we met. We were married in the Autumn.

In the report I tell about forming a group which went to Florence and Trieste. I have nothing to add, except that I was the one who worked most with the Slovene students. When "The Vanishing Island" went on the tour of Europe, I was invited to join them and help Jack Ravenscroft, who was responsible for selling programs in the local language at the beginning of the shows. In every capital I asked to meet the Italian ambassador. I told him about the play and MRA and invited him to the show. All the ambassadors I met came. The ambassador in London was Zoppi (I have forgotten his first name), who had been my father's boss in Nairobi as consul general and had had great regard for him; so it was a moving encounter. Jack Ravenscroft had very high regard of me and felt I did not assert myself enough, especially in the way I dressed. I was still wearing the clothes I had at University and had no money to buy new clothes. Jack made a collection among the other members of the "book team" to buy me a hat from the most exclusive hatter in London. He and the other members of the team were from nations where MRA was well established, and by making their needs known could have got some help; that was not my case. Jack was aware that I had stated working full time with MRA on a solid training in relations given by my father, a former diplomat, and acquired during my studies. I do not think any of the senior members of the team working in Italy were aware of it.

"The Vanishing Island" came to Milan in the Spring of 1956, but I came back one or two months before it. I was given the task of handling publications. It entailed handling our literature, translating the international quarterly, proof-reading it and overseeing the printing of it, producing the Italian edition of a monthly news bulletin, etc. The heaviest part was moving literature from one to another of the storage places which were given to us free, because we often ordered a quantity which was beyond our needs, not a decision of mine. Another is that at the end of the Summer conferences I was never invited to have an experience outside Italy. I do not know why and I came back not enthusiastically welcomed, and sometimes to make a visit to my parents. I must have had some shortcomings which I was not told about.

The run of "The Vanishing Island" was a glorious experience. Frank Buchman came for a part of it. The Archbishop of Milan invited him and all of us to take seats around the altar for the Whitsun high mass in the cathedral.

In February 1957 I went on the army officers course. I had delayed my military service registering as a student (which was legal), because a senator was trying to have a law passed, which offered voluntary service in a registered institution as an alternative. The vote on the bill kept being postponed and when I could no longer delay my service I asked to serve as an officer. Paolo instead had avoided military service by registering as having emigrated. I presume he had been accepted at Caux.

In the interview to decide whether I would be accepted I stated plainly that I was a pacifist, but as I was obliged to serve in the Army I wanted to give my best to my country. The interviewer liked my statement and accepted me. My military service was a mixed experience in which the positive side prevailed. I finished the course in anti-aircraft artillery with the highest marks of that year. I wrote regularly to my friends in the Milan team, but never had an answer, a fact which left a sour feeling. The only contact that I had with MRA was when the commander of

the officers school was asked to send me to Rome. Andrew Mackay was giving a presentation of the film "Freedom" to an association of retired officers who had served in Africa. He wanted them to meet a witness that MRA trained good citizens ready to serve their nation.

In the school I teamed up with two colleagues. One had just got a degree, and at University had been president of the Catholic Students association FUCI. The other one belonged to the Focolarini (mentioned in the report) and had served with them full time, taking care of the high school pupils to whom Cardinal Lercaro gave hospitality. Together we were a positive force for which the chaplain was grateful. Also the service as a Second Lieutenant in Pisa was an experience in leadership which was very useful afterwards.

At the end of my service in August 1958 I went home to my parents in Forlì with an idea about my future. My focolarini friend at the Artillery school before his military service lived in Bologna with two families in the movement which had rented a large flat. Both families had at least one bread winner, so they could pay the rent and also give hospitality to some full timers in their movement. I thought I could do the same. I was under a definite impression that my service as a full timer in MRA was not considered necessary. I was at the age when most of my colleagues at University had also just finished their military service, but right after having got a degree. Therefore I was at the age of an engineer looking for his first job, which at that time was not difficult to find. Therefore if I brushed up my Engineering studies at home, went to live with the team in Milan and looked for a job, I would find one, pay for my food and personal needs and also contribute to the support of the team, at least by paying the rent.

At my parents' home I called Ron Mann, who with his wife Mary was responsible for the Milan team, and described my proposal. He said that I should consult the man responsible for the work in Italy, who lived in Rome. At home I also found a sad surprise: my father was told that he was being transferred to Rome. Forlì is in northern Italy, so he could not commute. He worked in an organization created right after the war by Senator Ludovico Montini to build housing in the villages which had been heavily damaged in the war. The State or the municipalities had offices to provide workers homes in the cities, but there was nothing of the sort for the villages. The organization used lorries left by the Allies to transport the building material, and sold lorries, cars and other war material, also left by the Allies, to pay its staff, the acquisition of the material and the building firms. When the war material ran out, the State intervened.

The Finance minister who allotted the money had a protegee, who wanted to have my father's place, because he was from Forlì. The secretary of Cardinal Lercaro was a very good friend of mine, so I called him by phone to see if the Cardinal could intervene. At that time he was actually in Rome, engaged in preparing the Vatican Council. My friend suggested that I went to Rome and contacted him there. So "all roads lead to Rome!" My father lent me his FIAT 500 and I settled in a hotel to keep in touch both with the Cardinal and with the man responsible for MRA. I paid for my stay with the money I saved during my time as an officer.

I 'phoned the flat of the man responsible for MRA in Italy. His wife answered and said that he was very busy with a foreign guest and asked me to call again in a few days. I called repeatedly for a month and the answer was the same. My contact with the Cardinal's secretary was as fruitless. At the end he said that the Cardinal could not obtain the cancellation of the transfer. Everybody I told about it was very surprised. Cardinal Lercaro was known to be very powerful. Later I discovered the reason for the failure. If my father's boss did not go on with the transfer, the minister would have drastically cut the funds for his organization.

At the end of the month, having almost run out of my savings, I called Milan, asking if I could go there. I was accepted and I again called the wife of the man responsible for MRA in Italy, to say good-bye. She asked: "Have you considered in guidance ending your full-time engagement in MRA?" My answer was that I had not, but that I was already expected in Milan. On hindsight I should have told her the plan I had to discuss with her husband, asked her to tell him, and gone to Forlì instead of Milan. Then I could have had guidance about the next step.

In Autumn 1959 the films "The Crowning Experience", "Freedom" and "Men of Brazil" were dubbed into Italian in Rome. I went to Rome during the dubbing to be on hand if any changes had to be made in the text to fit the

original times, gestures, lip movements, etc., because it was not wise to leave the changes to the discretion of the dubbers. I made friends with the leading lady, a well-known and capable theatre actress called Marisa Mantovani. Most probably she was attracted by our way of life in MRA. She certainly appeared as a clean and positive person. I mention her because she will come again into the story of my life.

In the Autumn of 1960 there was an appeal for young men who would participate in the building of a TV studio on Mackinac Island. I could no longer be called a young man at 30, but the leader of the work in Italy suggested I went. I assumed that my civil engineering knowledge came into the suggestion and anyway asked the leader to mention it to the team on Mackinac Island. I also had the clear impression that an alternative to accepting was not being considered. So I said yes. When I arrived on Mackinac Island, a lovely place, nobody seemed to know that I was a civil engineer, and my telling them did not raise any interest, because the site office was already well staffed.

The building had a new type of steel structure, which was given free to test the innovative aspects. The columns and beams were not joined by rivets or by welding, but with bolts. This enabled a steel structure to be assembled without specialized personnel. We had an assembling team. The most delicate aspect of their work was handling the columns and beams with a crane. It could be dangerous. There was a bricklayers team, which put down the breezeblocks resting on the outer beams, a vital part of the soundproofing of the studio. Of course there were the plumbers and electricians, trained and led by craftsmen who had retired from their business, partly in order to help with the studio. The head of the plumbers was Dick Stollery, who with his wife will come again in my story. I do not remember many names, and I will omit the few I remember. We were all bound by a very warm friendship. A team working on a material job, all led by God's guidance is a novel experience.

At the end of the job I was invited to join the American labour team on a tour of Eastern Canada. They knew many labour leaders and industrial managers, with whom they wanted to share the lessons learnt in building the studio. I invented a labour background, a sin I want to confess. My Sicilian great-grandfather was a blacksmith with a business in a small town inland. That was my flimsy connection with labour, because in reality he was a small businessman. His son and my grandfather did not stay in the business. His training enabled him to become a Cavalry petty officer, a career he pursued with great success until he died contracting a tropical disease on a visit to Libya, during the 1911 war against the Turkish empire. Adapting my story and my conviction to what was expected of me was man pleasing inspired by my impression of not having been considered suitable for full time work; it affected my engagement in MRA, my contribution to its battle and my reputation in the team.

We were about to leave for Ottawa, when a message arrived, asking me to return to Milan on Paolo's request. I was surprised, but not displeased. After all I was needed in Italy! When I came back the reason for the request came out. During my absence the pamphlet "Ideology and coexistence" was being distributed in the mail. The amount going out depended on the availability of funds for the distribution. Paolo did not agree with it. I would not have agreed with it either. That the Soviet Union used coexistence to infiltrate the West was true, and it was a serious threat especially in the United States, where it weakened its stance, and in many Third World nations which were undecided whether to tie themselves to the Soviet Union or the Western powers. But in Italy the situation was different. Communism was already part of the fabric of the nation, and the aim of MRA was to win the hearts of its members, not to combat them. The damage caused by that booklet will be manifest further in my story. Anyway the distribution of the booklet was suspended, probably for lack of funds, before I arrived.

All the Milan team was in Caux. It was a few weeks before the end of the Summer conference, so I went there. In Caux I was asked to go to Frank Buchman's room, because Frank wanted information about the Catholic bishop of Marquette. Mackinac Island is in his diocese and in the past the bishop had been strongly opposed to MRA, because he was convinced that it led Catholics to heresy. At the last Mass at Mackinaw, the village on the mainland in front of Mackinac Island, I found out, probably by reading the diocesan bulletin, that the bishop had changed his mind and was now in favour of MRA. I wrote that in my last letter to Milan. By the way from Mackinac I regularly wrote to Milan, but never got an answer, as far as I can remember. The news must have been

passed on to Frank. He asked many questions, which I answered. At the end of the conversation the man who was in the room with Frank accompanied me to the door complimenting me for my answers; very flattering!

A week or two later Frank decided to go to Freudenstadt, the town where he had the inspiration to found MRA. The mayor had given the name Frank Buchman Weg to the path leading into the Black Forest where Frank loved to walk. Many people were invited to go with him, including Paolo and Mariella. The conference soon came to an end and I stayed in Caux. Morris Martin was left in Caux to "guard the fort". I worked a lot with him, I do not remember in what capacity. I was fussy, as usual, and at one point Morris exclaimed: "You drive me to drink!" I have never forgotten that remark. It helped me correct my ways. When Patricia and I with our daughter Margherita had come to live near Vicenza, from where I am now writing. Morris came to visit us. He had lost his wife Enid and had come from the USA on a tour of Europe. It was a very warm encounter, with a lot of talk and exchange of news.

Frank died soon after. Everybody left Freudenstadt. Some went to Allentown for the burial. Paolo, Mariella and the others from Milan returned there. I, of course, joined them. I do not remember what we did in Milan. That was when Paolo told me his doubts about the massive distribution of "Ideology and coexistence". It was from then on that we worked more intensely together. At some point Paolo and Mariella, probably with others, were invited to South America. Luc de Montmollin and I were left to "guard the fort" in Milan. If Luc was already married to Susy Bruner she was certainly with us. I do not remember anybody else. Andrew and Jean Mackay were in Rome and Jerry Teuber was with them. Being few we could not engage in a major action. We visited people who were close to MRA. Luc could afford to buy the "Corriere della Sera" every day, which I could not; he passed it on to me, so I could catch up with life and politics in Italy and in the world. For me it was also a creative time. I designed the logo for El Condor, which was used on the posters for the play and in other printed matter. I also devised the way to open the cities to the arrival of El Condor. When the play was in one city we asked the Prefect, the Union leaders and the local head of the school system to write a letter to his/her counterpart in the next city.

When El Condor came, the tour started in Bari. If I remember rightly I knew of a useful contact there and told Andrew. He decided to go with Jerry shortly before the group was due to arrive. The visit was a success. I and others applied my system for the next laps. I was also responsible for printing the posters. The tour was not confined to the performances of the play. Philips of the Netherlands had given us a portable 35 mm projector and a screen; so we showed "Men of Brazil" in the squares also of neighbouring towns. The showings were introduced by Damasio Cardoso and Nelson Marcellino, the protagonists of the events told in the film, and acted by them. It was a terrific success. A big part of the merit for this extension of the impact of El Condor must be given to the backstage team made up mainly by North American young men. They not only installed the scenery and lights for the play, often making up for deficiencies of the theatre, but also installed the projector and screen for the film, often in record time

Once one of the actors of El Condor and I were sent to some towns around the city where we were stationed, in order to ask the mayors to invite the film and to arrange the publicity. Our visits were a great success, thanks to the impact of the play. The next morning Andrew Mackay asked us to lead the meeting of the group and tell about our visits. Our leadership was not very good, and Andrew reproached us, especially me. I was very hurt, because he was raising a sore point: the fact that I had never been given training or experience in leadership like others. Many years later, when I was already in a job, I had an exchange of letters with Hans Joerg Gareis. He wrote that this difference of treatment happened also in Germany. He was a blue eyed boy, while others he mentioned were confined to back room jobs. This difference in treatment embarrassed him.

I have nothing to add to what I wrote in "Frank Buchman's work in Italy" from the end of the Italian tour of "El Condor to the time of my marriage to Patricia, except a detail about my experience selling tickets for "Through the garden wall" in Bologna, which follows. . It was a painful time for me. We were ordered not to reveal that we were MRA. I do not know where the order came from. There was the fear that the recent distribution of "Ideology and Coexistence" would lead the Communists not to help us, while instead they liked the play, which

matched their line. So I had to keep clear of all the friends of MRA. We also needed to save on our expenses; I booked in a bleak small hotel in the city centre, which, as I discovered shortly before leaving, in daytime gave some rooms to illegal couples. The last straw was when I went to see the alderman in charge of culture, a communist, in order to get his support and introductions for the sale of tickets. As I went in Marisa Mantovani, mentioned before, came out. She had met the alderman to obtain the mayor's support for a run of the theatrical group she had put up. When she saw me she almost embraced me, but I had to pretend I did not know her.

Soon after having said yes to my request to marry me Patricia came to Germany with the cast of *Up With People* as the secretary of Blanton Belk. The Germans most generously invited me to Bonn, where the cast was at that time, gave me hospitality in their house and offered Patricia and me a lunch all to ourselves at the Parliament restaurant looking over the Rhine. It was a Friday and I remember having difficulty in ordering a dish of fish, because in those days the Germans were not so familiar as now with English.

Patricia was disappointed with my clothing. I had shabby clothes and a raincoat with a tear patched with scotch tape. She had been impressed by a photo of mine smartly dressed as an officer and had told me so. It was the season of roses and there were many street vendors with dwarf roses. I just could afford to buy a bunch for her. When the cast moved to cities in the Ruhr I chased after her by train, having learnt how to read German timetables. When Blanton went on a mission in India Patricia and I took the opportunity to visit our families. The first one was mine, and my father was most generous giving me a diamond engagement ring to present to Patricia, and two suits for me, a day one and an evening one plus shoes. From there we went to see Patricia's mother. Ianthe, the widow of my uncle, lived a few miles from her, so I spent the nights at her home. We had decided to marry in a Catholic church and it took us some time to find one in the neighbourhood which did not have all the old-fashioned statues of saints, which were typical of British Catholic churches. Patricia's mother paid a flight for us with a small airplane which went to Cardiff; so we could also visit Patricia's brother Tony, whom I met for the first time. We got on well together, and his wife Sandra was most welcoming.

After that visit Patricia went to Los Angeles to work in the accounting office with Jack Ravenscroft and I went back to Milan. I was soon invited to Los Angeles as well, to help Dick Stollery in directing the renovation of the headquarters in South Flower Street. It was just an excuse for me to see Patricia again. On the way there I was asked to make a detour to Mackinac Island, where Jerry Nelson was planning and directing the construction of the library for Mackinac College. I was asked to make a survey and drawing of the area where the library was about to be built. I wonder now whether it was a way of redressing for having neglected my Engineering knowledge at the time of the construction of the TV studio. Jerry later sent me a letter inviting me with my wife for the inauguration of the library, and expressing his appreciation for my work in plotting the land.

In Los Angeles Dick and his wife were most generous with Patricia and me. One thing they did was to take us to Yosemite National Park, stopping on the way in other places owned by members of MRA. I do not remember how long I stayed in Los Angeles, but it was an extremely happy time, not only because of Patricia, but also because the building was a charming place. For instance the dining room had an open air part overlooking the city. I wonder if the present owners use it so well as we did. From Los Angeles Patricia went home to prepare for the wedding and I went to Milan with a brief visit home for the paper work needed for it. I arrived at Patricia's home a few days before the wedding, hired the traditional morning suit used not only by the bridegroom, but also by all male relatives and guests. Paolo and Mariella came the day before, and so did my parents, who were given hospitality like me by Aunt Ianthe. The evening before the wedding we all celebrated Patricia's birthday in a restaurant. I had asked Rodolfo Crisci, one of the students in Naples of the Condor time, then married and working away from home, to be my best man. I was hoping to involve him again in our work, but he refused. I think his mother was displeased, because she sent us a very generous wedding gift. Paolo nobly stepped in. In the British wedding ceremony at one point the bridegroom says to the bride: "With all my wealth I thee endow", and puts a half crown, a big silver coin, into her hand. Well, at that point, having paid for the flowers in church and the hire of my suit, half a crown, an eighth of a pound, was all I had. From that point I relied on Patricia's income, which came from some Austin Reed shares she inherited from her father.

We had a buffet lunch in the lovely garden of Patricia's mother, which she had fiercely defended from my desire to pick flowers to give Patricia. At one point we disappeared, changed into normal clothes and went off in a car we were lent. Patricia's mother had booked us in a hotel in a fabulous spot on the Thames. We had to stop at a railway crossing. I pulled Patricia to my side and gave her a big kiss. We immediately heard hooting from many cars. We turned round and discovered that many guests were following us on their way home. We had three or four wonderful days at the hotel, went back to the home of Patricia's mother and packed our wedding gifts in tea trunks. We left for Italy by train with twenty items of luggage! Shortly after our marriage Patricia's mother wanted me to have a comparable source of income, and gave me some Austin Reed shares. Another part of our income came from the author's rights for the translation of the UWP songs. Shortly after our arrival in Milan Austin Reed gave its shareholders some non-voting shares. We sold some and bought a car. The director of the Milan outlet of FIAT was a friend of MRA, so he gave us a FIAT 1100 at a very good price. The car gave us much more freedom of movement. The income did not make us fully self-supporting, but freed me from anxiety about our needs.

My wife Patricia and I dedicated twenty years to MRA and later Up With People, sharing a passion for a change in the life of Italy. At the end we found that we had not attained anything concrete besides the friendship of some people who shared our conviction. But Italy has many good points in the social sphere, such as precious non-profit organizations, associations pursuing positive aims and a small, but not negligible, improvement in our Administration and political life. I like to think that our battle has helped. For me personally also the painful experiences which I have described were useful; they contributed to my spiritual life. For example being so long in need helped me understand the feelings of the African immigrants who ring our bell, asking for money or food.

On two occasions we hoped we could spread MRA again. One was when we met Freda Thaler, an employee of the school system in South Tyrol. After having been to Caux we went to visit her at her home in Meran. In a critical time in the relations between the Tyrolean and Italian ethnic group she had taken some leaders from the two sides to Caux. They found an agreement which was officially adopted when they came home. She had also taken the famous idealist Alexander Lang to Caux; he found there a way to fulfil his ideal. Unfortunately back home he did not meet a response to his proposals, fell into a depression and committed suicide. We planned to do something together with Freda, but nothing came of it.

Another was when we were invited to Bologna, to meet Senator Giovanni Bersani, who as an undersecretary of Foreign Affairs had brought about the Dahomey agreement, a milestone in the relations between African states and in their growth. In the agreement Italy and other European nations were partners on a basis of equality. He had later gone to Caux. He found the experience there precious. Wanting to contact other Italians associated with MRA, he was given our name and address. In Bologna we met other people mostly from that city, who had been to Caux. Bersani's idea was to found an Initiatives of Change association in Italy. Those few of us eventually founded it. Bersani was already in his late seventies and no longer very active. Initiatives depended on us younger ones, and we needed teamwork. A friend of mine in Vicenza was a priest who ran a Catholic cultural institution and was in charge of ecumenical activities of the diocese. I hoped he would be interested in the ideas of Initiatives of Change, but he did not respond. My failure was also due to the lack of teamwork of the friends in Bologna.

God has shown us in many ways He looks after us. As Frank used to say "where God Guides, God provides". We have never been rich, but neither in want. Here are two examples. When we left UWP we started looking for a flat we could buy with a mortgage at a reasonable price. After discarding many options Patricia had guidance "Walk down via Melzi d'Eril. Then walk down the streets leading off it one at a time and look for flats on sale or to let" We did this and as we were walking back to via Melzi d'Eril from the second side street I suddenly turned around and saw a building we had passed. It was clad in a covering which denoted that it was being built. I said: "let's go back and look. It had replaced the last of the 19th century blocks of flats for labourers which had originally filled the area. When we visited it I immediately recognized a good option. Also the terms for the mortgage were good. There was a flat available which fitted our needs, so we booked it. Three years later, when we moved to Vicenza and sold the flat, the price had considerably risen.

I went into teaching Surveying in a State surveyor. Normally applicants made their application one year ahead of the day they could start teaching. That year instead the deadline was postponed to the following Spring, so I was able to make my application in time for the start of next school year in September. This was another little miracle of God's provision. When my seniority was sufficient to ask for a transfer we had guidance to leave Milan because of the smog. I asked for a post preferably in my parents' city or alternatively near my brother. I got the latter. We came to Vicenza, near where we live now. We were anxious to buy a flat, or better still a house with garden, to avoid the depreciation of our currency which was looming. There are many houses around Vicenza with a garden which then were at a reasonable price. I had an architect friend in Vicenza. He recommended we did not rush. He would find a good bargain. We took a flat on rent. After almost two years no bargain was forthcoming. I met my friend by chance in the street and asked him. He replied: "Oh! Just yesterday I was offered a plot of land in a new development just outside the city at a very low price. The man trying to sell it had bought it cheaply from the farmer who owned the land. He hoped to sell it with a good margin, but the building permission on it was about to expire and he had not found a buyer. He quoted the price he had paid himself. The architect called him to his office with me, to make sure the price was not increased, and we struck a bargain. I altered the original design myself taking into account Patricia's wishes, and found a contractor. My experience in building the studio on Mackinac Island was useful, because the new materials and methods used there were just coming to Italy and not many builders knew them. If we had not received all the help from Above we could never have built the house of our dreams.

Adriano Costa, Caldogno 15 November 2022.