

OM Arts School Sparks 'Fire of Freedom' in Italy

On the anniversary of a change in religious freedom for Christians in Italy, new sparks of hope emanated from the Pellice Valley.

Operation Mobilization Italy was hosting the first-ever OM Arts International School of Mission, an 11-week training program to place career visual artists, dancers and musicians in cross-cultural missions.

In Italian history, Feb. 16 marks the anniversary of a significant law which granted political, civil and religious freedom to Waldensian believers, enabling them to practice their way of life and belief in Christ. Through this new freedom granted in 1848, centuries of religious oppression, persecution and martyrdom ended.

People across Italy, and particularly in the Pellice Valley, celebrate by lighting candles and gathering around large bonfires where they sing hymns and give thanks to God. The bonfires lit on that first night spread the word across the Waldensian valleys that freedom of worship had been granted.

Likewise, Feb. 16 heralded a new light in the Pellice Valley this year that will spark far-reaching ministries through the OM Arts International School of Mission.

"As we stood in front of a large bonfire in the town of Bobbio Pellice," says a long-term worker with OM Italy, "we could see several other bonfires lit up across the valley, a chain of light in the middle of utter darkness, spreading a message of freedom."

Now, 2.5 months later, teachers at the Arts School are witnessing the fire of freedom spreading in their students.

On Saturday evenings, the students present their creative homework assignments to the group. On a recent Saturday, one dancer explained that she'd had difficulty exploring the assignment on personhood: "As I worked in the studio, God helped me to see dance as a legitimate gift. He created me to dance, and I realized that I'm a dancer as well as an administrator. God is calling me to embrace both gifts."

She went on to say that she hadn't finished the assignment but brought a song to play and would move with the music.

"Our beautiful dancer launched into what looked like a completely choreographed piece, with abandon and delight, her face now radiant with the most beautiful smile," remembers OM Arts International teacher and coach Pat Butler. "The tears were now in our eyes—to see a person dancing with abandon before the Lord, as if none of us were in the room. It was a holy moment."

This student's experience of God through dance exemplifies the vision of the OM Arts International School of Mission: to graduate artists passionate and prepared to employ their gifts for long-term, cross-cultural ministry.

"Turning artists into Christ-centred, spiritually mature artists is no small feat," explains Butler. "We long for it, but can only set the stage and ask God to do the rest. That night, He seemed to roll up His sleeves and say, 'Watch me work!'"

The memory of the bonfire in Bobbio Pellice still rests in the hearts of many Arts School participants, a fitting beginning to an incredible journey.

"Standing there [at the bonfire] with students that had arrived that same day, our hearts became full with prayer of expectation," remembers the OM Italy worker. "May our lives burn with the fire of the Spirit; may we see His light come forth through the darkness, bringing a message of freedom

across Italy and the nations.”

Please pray for the OM Arts International School of Mission and its continued impact as the artists scatter to share Jesus’ love throughout the world.

For more information about the OM Arts International School of Mission, visit .