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IMB church planter in Italy baptizes in bathtub

by Reid Karr, posted Monday, March 16, 2020 (one month ago)

EDITOR'S NOTE: Reid Karr is a church planter with the IMB, serving in Italy.

ROME (BP) -- Although the actual number of people infected by COVID-19 (coronavirus) remains rather small when compared to the world's population, the responses to it have effectively shut down many parts of the world. In Italy, for example, the government continues to set stricter measures in order to stem the spread of the virus, that has infected (at the time of writing this) more than 10,000 people and killed more than 600.

Italy is also a country that has experienced years of decreasing birth rates and is now considered an elderly country; the death rate in Italy is reflecting that reality. Currently travel is severely restricted, and stores and restaurants are all to remain closed until further notice. Only grocery stores and pharmacies are permitted to remain open, with some industries operating with restrictions. Going to a friend's house for lunch or dinner is not allowed.

These restrictions are of course having a significant impact on religious and church meetings of any kind. Churches have had to cancel services and find creative ways to meet and have community. Modern technology has been a huge blessing and help for many seeking corporate worship.

On Sunday, March 8, in Rome, the evangelical churches Breccia di Roma San Paolo and Breccia di Roma centro (downtown) were to meet together to celebrate the baptism of Akille De Chirico. Akille was adopted as a young boy from Ethiopia into an Italian family. His family has loved him unconditionally and walked with him through good times and difficult times. His father is a faithful pastor and his mother is a dedicated nurse.

Akille spent his childhood in a home where the Gospel was taught and lived, and he followed his family to church where the Gospel was faithfully preached. For Akille, however, Christianity was just one religion among many and had no claim to absolute truth. Akille began attending the church plant Breccia di Roma San Paolo in September 2018. The Lord built on the foundation of his many years of exposure to the Gospel and opened his eyes to the exclusive truth claims of the good news of Jesus Christ. The Lord revealed to Akille that forgiveness of sins, redemption, salvation and eternal life are found in Christ alone. Akille made the decision to follow his profession of faith in Jesus with believer's baptism.

The evening before his baptism, however, the government implemented new regulations that forbid all religious meetings and ceremonies. The churches simply were unable to meet for the baptism. Relatives had traveled in from out of town and were themselves worried about getting home with new travel bans.

While the churches planned to respect the government regulations, they did not want to forego the opportunity to celebrate the new life Akille has in Christ and the testimony of his baptism. Church leaders made the decision to move the baptism to his house. He would be baptized in the bathtub and those present would witness a visible demonstration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

While a handful of church members and relatives gathered at his house, others participated in the service thanks to a livestream of the celebration. Approximately 40 church members streamed the baptism live, and to date approximately 1,500 people have viewed the baptism online. The churches are thankful for the technology that permits them to celebrate the Gospel in unusual circumstances, such as the coronavirus outbreak.

Akille's baptism, and its broadcast, is an example of God bringing glory to Himself during this crisis. Adopted into a loving family here on earth, Akille has now also been adopted into a heavenly family by an eternal and loving God. Coronavirus or no coronavirus, church members and hundreds more witnessed Akille's baptism that visibly testifies to his eternal adoption and his new life in Jesus Christ. To God be all the glory, and may He continue to be at work through the church to bring more to a saving faith in Christ.

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