

# **Alton Couple Share Inside Look at Ministry and Business in Italy During Coronavirus Crisis**

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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ALTON - Bradley Howe, an Alton High School graduate, has served as a missionary and minister in Italy for several years with his wife, Beth, and has witnessed firsthand the devastation of COVID-19 to Italy.

The stats in Italy are brutal, with 22,170 coronavirus deaths, 168,941 positive cases. Schools and universities have not been in session since Feb. 21. The last church service for his congregation was Feb. 23 before the official shutdown. Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte confirmed the lockdown will continue until May 3. The official lockdown in the country started on March 3. Some experts predict Italy may be free of new COVID-19 cases come May 16.

Howe has retained a missionary relationship with his home church back in the U.S. - Brown Street Baptist in Alton - through all his years in Italy. Pastor Greg Linscott and the congregation are exceptionally proud of Brad's efforts in Italy. Howe said during the lockdown, live streaming church services into homes is so important. He added ministers are forbidden to visit homes and that has limited the ministry "big time."

"Our ministry is very relational, but this global virus is not forcing us to stop sharing the gospel," he said. "This is a global pandemic that is forcing everyone to their knees. If

live-streaming is an easy option, churches should go for it, but you can also pre-record and post on your own Youtube channel.”

Howe continued and said: “A small sector of businesses reopened recently like bookstores, laundromats, children's clothing stores but not in the whole country. Where we are, only the children's clothing stores are permitted to reopen. Plumbers can return to work and a few other service industries too. The total reopening of the country to what it was pre-coronavirus will still take many weeks I'm afraid. Thankfully, numbers are beginning to decline. Fewer deaths, fewer infected persons, etc. I'm afraid though, that we still have a long way to go.

“Our kids live in South Carolina and from what we have heard of their grocery stores, the supplies are greatly limited. I can say that we have never lacked for anything really.....not even a shortage of toilet paper here. Flour is harder to keep stocked as is yeast. Mothers and wives have resorted to baking bread in the home since the bakeries are shut down. Many are baking homemade pizza too. Restaurants have been totally shut down since March 12 and only those restaurants like pizzerias that already had a delivery service in place are allowed to continue only to make home deliveries. No takeaway service is permitted. McDonald's and Burger King are shut down tight.”

Howe said Italy is highly restricted and said: “Folks must only be away from home for work, medical or necessity related reasons such as going to the bank, gas station or grocery store and pharmacy. I guess folks can now go purchase a new children's book or outfit as of today.

"Most kids won't see a normal classroom until September. There is some talk about getting senior High schoolers back to limited classes by June to finish out the year and this could also be implemented on a school by school basis. From what I was reading today, they don't plan to allow barbershops nor beauty shops to open until May 25 and then only a small number of people will be allowed in at a time. 1 or 2, etc. depending upon the size of the shop.”

Howe said, of course, none of the residents in Italy like the present situation. It is like nothing anyone has ever seen in their lifetime.

The minister reminded everyone we should all remember how blessed we are for what we do have in this difficult time, especially those who have food, water and a place to live.

“We will get through this, but it is very uncomfortable,” Howe added. “I encourage you to talk or text each other as often as possible and to help feel connected pray over the phone with each or at least ask parishioners to share any needs or prayer requests they might have.

"We will get through this, but it will be very uncomfortable for several more days, even a few more months."

