

Hineni!

By Frank Lofaro

It's Good Friday morning and I'm typing my first column as the new President/CEO of Christian Management Association. I'm in the basement in a "manly" blue and brown room I've claimed as my personal domain. My wife Ellie is up in the kitchen making her magical pasta sauce, along with the meatballs, sausage, pork, bracciole and veal cutlets.

A public speaker and author, she travels coast to coast asserting that she's "domestically challenged." However, when it comes to her signature Sunday spread, I beg to differ. Twenty-one friends and relatives will sit in our dining room after the Sunday morning church service and we'll all experience the sweet life: what Italians affectionately refer to as "La Dolce Vita."

My 17-year-old son Jordan will mow the lawn and help me finish up mulching the flower beds. My 14-year-old daughter Capri will help me plant some flowers and help her Mom roll the meatballs. My 19-year-old daughter Paris will sleep in and go for a manicure. Her plane landed very late last night and, since she's an exhausted college freshman, we decided to spoil her during this brief three-day respite. We really miss her. Our dog Bella will spend Good Friday the same way she does every other day of the year: without a care.

I've been sitting here for quite a while pondering the many issues that will affect, define and challenge CMA in this new millennium. I'm one who enjoys the process of setting, measuring and, with God's help – achieving goals. My natural tendency would be to review our history and lay out a five-phase plan for the coming year.

But, thanks to the Lord, the editor of this fine magazine, and my wife—I've seen the light, and the unanimous guidance has pointed me in a more personal direction. "Frank, they want to know who you are. There'll be plenty of opportunities to discuss plans, programs and possibilities for the future. Tell the good folks a little about the new guy."

Okay. I turned 50 last year and have never felt better. I was born in Brooklyn, raised on Long Island and grew up in a very middle class "Wonder Years" neighborhood. My dad was a factory laborer and mom also worked to help make ends meet. I'm the second of four and Sunday was sacred—more for family, food and fellowship than anything else.

I commuted to SUNY Stony Brook (not enough funds to go away) and graduated with an economics degree. Getting money was my goal, I suppose because we never had much,

and I became both curious and desirous. I opened a restaurant that did well, and then a second and third. I befriended a beautiful high school English teacher who was the first person to tell me about the greatest love of all. I came to a personal, life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ and married Ellie two years later. It was 1982.

By that time, I had earned my MBA and soon began attending St. John's Law School at night. I sold the restaurants in 1983 and patiently waited for the Lord to guide me in my career. Early in my spiritual journey, I learned a Hebrew word taken from Isaiah 6. The text reads: "Here I am, send me." The Hebrew equivalent is "**Hineni.**" I started making that my prayer, and I was excited to see how the Lord would answer.

"Hey God... Hineni!"

An older gentleman from church approached me about buying his manufacturing plant, so he could be free to smuggle Bibles to China. The production of high-end showcase locks is a niche market, and sales more than quadrupled within five years. Then I had my own "success to significance" epiphany, and

determined that we'd sell everything we owned (not the three babies) and serve the Lord full time by my 35th birthday. **"Hineni!"**

In 1993, I had the great joy of joining the ranks of those who serve the far-reaching ministry of Prison Fellowship. It was a great privilege to be under the tutelage of Chuck Colson, Ron Nikkel and Tom Pratt. Those men taught me a great deal about ministry, humility and kingdom thinking. After eight years, I entered into a consulting contract with the President's Faith Based Initiative. **"Hineni!"**

A friend told me about the search CMA was conducting and thought I might be a good match, since I love the Lord and I love the science and art and high calling of management. So that puts me in this chair – at this computer – writing this column.

Yes, it's a very good Friday for you and me. By His stripes, we are healed. By His death, we find true life. By His mercy, we are free. By His blood, we are cleansed. That is great news!

May you sense His presence in big and small ways in this season of hope and new life. It's time to plant some flowers.

Frank Lofaro welcomes all CMA members and associates to email him at frank@cmaonline.org. He's eager to hear from you.



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