



# Berni's Life Was Turned Upside Down

***From drug addict to church planter in just six years!***

By Michael Carlson, Missionary to Italy

**H**ere comes Bernardino wearing his sandals, tie-dyed shirt, and the leather vest he stitched himself. He made some goat cheese for today's potluck; he washed his hands with soap he made from an ancient Roman recipe; and he's chewing a raw coffee bean for its medicinal purposes.

Bernardino—or Berni, as he likes to be called—is a sight to behold! However, it's what you cannot see that makes Berni's story so compelling. You can't see the wasted years of drug abuse, the treks to Tibet and forays into New-Age thinking, the eccentric talent that earned awards for paintings and sculptures ... and you can't see a heart the size of all Italy that beats for Christ and His Church.

Six years ago, Berni was famous in his hometown of Blera, just north of Rome—famous for both his artistic talent and his drug addiction.

His artwork of that period, while show-

ing great talent, was filled with morbid, disturbing images—smoking heads, distorted figures, glaring eyes, and dark, angry colors.

However, no one is beyond the long, loving reach of our mighty God, and Berni was no exception. A former girlfriend accepted the Lord and prayed for Berni for an entire year before she and her husband were able to sit down to talk with him. As they listened to his troubled heart, Berni began a spiritual walk that brought him, step by step, to Jesus.

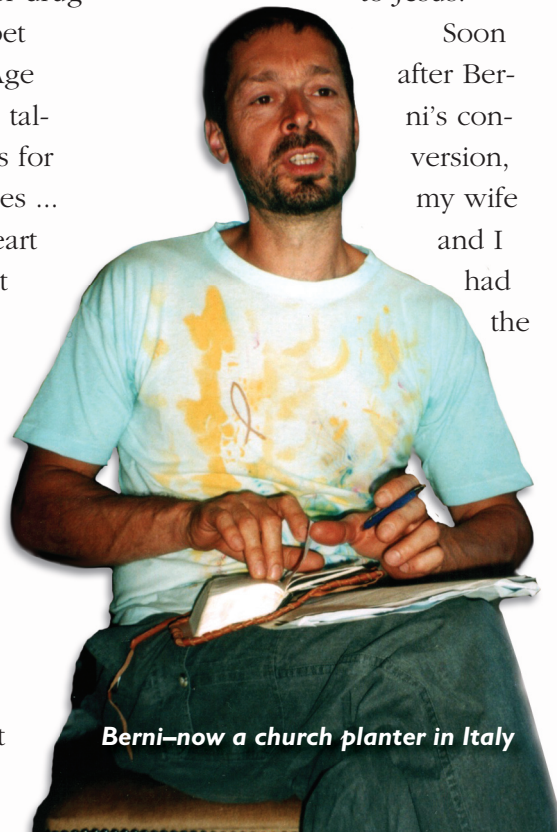
Soon after Berni's conversion, my wife and I had the

privilege of discipling him in our small group. Now, Berni's life is nearly unrecognizable. He teaches in the small group, instructs children in Sunday School, leads worship services, and shares his faith with a love and naturalness that are beautiful to behold.

Berni's dedication to ministry has earned him a place on the leadership team of our Greater Europe Mission church plant in the unreached town of Montefiascone, Italy. Berni's greatest tool for evangelism is his artistic talent. Recently he began to exhibit his art chronologically. People enter a room to see his talented depictions of the dark side of life, but as they move toward the center they begin to see brighter images—rainbows and hands upraised in worship.

They notice Bible verses written across the canvas or on the frames, and they ask Berni the obvious question: "What explains the difference between your early artwork and today's?"

Berni smiles and shares the love of Jesus that turned his life upside down.



***Berni—now a church planter in Italy***

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