

The ITALIAN BATTALION

On the Front Lines of World Evangelism

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ITALY

Dear Praying Friends,

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Give Italy a Chance

Italy is experiencing the greatest time for Baptist church planting since its golden era (1872–1922). George Boardman Taylor was pastoring the First Baptist Church in Staunton, Virginia, when he was appointed by the Foreign Mission Board (FMB) to oversee the Baptist mission in Italy in 1873. His father, James B. Taylor, served as the chief executive officer of the FMB until his death in 1871.

Aided by General Giuseppe Garibaldi, Italy's new king, Victor Emmanuel II, unified the entire "boot" under one flag in 1871. The new Italian constitutional monarchy established state education and granted civil liberties that contributed to an extraordinary expansion of the Gospel. For the first time in centuries, the Bible was being freely preached on the Italian peninsula. After 25 years of ministry in Italy, George Boardman Taylor reported that 24 Baptist churches had been started. By 1922, Peter Chiminelli wrote in *The Baptists in Italy* that there were more than 45 Baptist churches in the country, nearly all led by Italian pastors. The impact of the free distribution of the Bible and gospel literature cannot be overstated. In the opening pages of G. Braxton Taylor's 1929 book, *Southern Baptists in Sunny Italy*, recording his father's work, he includes the following quote from General Garibaldi: "The Bible is the Cannon that shall free Italy."

But 1922 marked a dark turn in Italian religious liberty with the rise of fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. His alliance with the Pope led to the suppression of non-Catholic confessions. However, the decline of the Baptists in Italy must be attributed to two major factors. First, between 1880 and 1920, more than five million Italians emigrated to the Americas, including many Italian Baptists. Second, the rise of modernism, which denied the authority of Scripture. By World War II, the Italian Baptist Union had largely embraced liberal theology. Today, the Baptist Union openly supports the LGBTQ+ movement and denies a literal interpretation of the Bible.

This history teaches two powerful lessons:

1. Bible preaching is generally well received in Italy. Many Italians have never truly heard the Bible preached before. The power of the Bible is seen in the amazing response when people hear the Bible preached for the first time.
2. Every generation must reach its own generation.

Though I regret the direction that the Baptist Union took in Italy regarding the authority of Scripture, our confidence is still in the fact that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

Following World War II, Baptist missionaries came to Italy, but interestingly, they did not plant Baptist churches. Because the Brethren Church resisted the theological decay of modernism, many Baptist missionaries from the 1950s through the 1970s chose to assist Brethren churches instead of establishing Baptist works. Their contribution was significant, but Baptist church planting remained mostly dormant. A few Baptist church planters arrived in the 1980s and 1990s, but the progress was slow.

When our family arrived in Grosseto, Italy, in late 2006, we realized that the Lord clearly had prepared the soil in this rural Tuscan city for at least 20 years before our arrival. We were astonished at the fruit we witnessed as the Lord rapidly built a church in a country which had been characterized as a "difficult field." We believe that the difficulty Baptist missionaries faced in Italy was largely due to the lack of Baptist church planters. At the time, we only knew a handful of other Baptist missionaries. This small group of missionaries was faithfully seeking to reach 60 million people with no Baptist Bible institute and no Baptist camp. To put that in perspective, Italy is approximately the size of Georgia and Florida combined but with nearly twice their population. Can you imagine doubling the population of these two states while leaving fewer than 10 Fundamental Baptist churches? Praying desperately that the Lord of the Harvest would send forth laborers into the harvest field of Italy became an integral part of our mission (Matt. 9:38).

Over the last 15 years, we have seen the Lord answer prayers. Today there are around 15 Baptist church planters in Italy. In the summer of 2025, our co-workers, Paul and Kelly Childers, organized two weeks of the only Baptist camp in the country, Camp Aquila. Missionary Brandon Cook has begun a layman school of the Bible, which we hope will develop into a Baptist

Bible institute. Missionary Amanda Baker and six other missionaries, including our church in Grosseto, are deeply invested in this project. BWM missionary Joey Tacon in Pisa is working on translating and printing solid study resources for our Italian laymen and preachers. Former atheist Giuliano Falossi is a deacon in the Grosseto church and a regular guest preacher in many of the Baptist churches throughout Italy. Fausto D'Amelio became the first national Italian Baptist church planter, ordained and sent out to plant a Baptist church in Foggia, Italy. The Grosseto church hosts several American Bible-college interns and mission trips each year to recruit future missionaries for Italy. Right now, at least four missionary families are on deputation preparing to come.

Though still in the pioneer stage, the ministry in Italy is beginning to take shape. We need more missionaries to plant more churches. Our prayer is that this will lead to qualified, called, and trained Italian men and women to propagate the church-planting effort in their own country.

What would happen if we could double the number of missionaries in Italy? What if we had a Baptist church in each of the 20 regions? Or one church in each of the 107 provinces of Italy? My plea is to give Italy a chance.

I encourage you, as you pray the Lord of the Harvest, to come visit and consider whether God might want YOU to be a Baptist church planter in Italy.

Give Italy a chance.

Your fellow servants in Grosseto, Italy,

Frank & Jennie Maietta