



Ernesto Olivero Profile

Ernesto Olivero was born in 1940 in Mercato San Severino (Salerno). In 1964, in Turin, he founded Sermig (“Servizio Missionario Giovani”, or “Young Missionary Service”) with his wife Maria and a group of friends. It was the beginning of a shared path based on global ethics and a common dream: defeat hunger with acts of justice and promote development and solidarity in third world countries.

He used to work in a bank and has always been committed to help the weakest and the outcasts, in addition to participating in different missions around the world. He has three children and seven grandchildren, and young people have always been a priority for him. He wants to share with them an ideal to live for and help them rediscover the sense of their lives.

Within Sermig, he created the Brotherhood of Hope, formed by young people and married couples, families, monks and nuns who spend their life to help the poor and the young, living according to the teachings of the Gospel and being a symbol of hope for everyone.

Thanks to his determination, in 1983, Ernesto obtained an old military arsenal from the City of Turin and transformed it into the Arsenal of Peace. So, where many of the weapons used during the Two World Wars were forged, an urban monastery was created. It is open twenty-four hours a day and it represents a space for coexistence, dialogue, young education and hospitality for people in need. It provides a shelter for men and women who look for help to change their lives. The Arsenal is also a place of meeting for thousands of young people who come both from Italy and abroad to discuss, talk and grow up together. It is the source of a solidarity network that reaches all the five continents and a place for prayer and silence, culture and education.

Sermig works thanks to the free contribution of thousands of friends and volunteers who share their time, professionalism, money, spiritual and material goods. The sharing of these resources allows Sermig to be supported to 93% by the people.

With his belief in resource sharing, justice and dialogue as preconditions for peace, Ernesto Olivero personally accompanied the more than 70 peacekeeping missions that Sermig conducted in conflict zones like Somalia, Rwanda, Yugoslavia and Albania. Basic necessities were sent to the people living there, without making any political or religious distinction. Thus, he has performed around 3.050 humanitarian actions in more than 90 countries, including studies and projects to promote self-development and necessities sent to entire populations and single persons.

In 1991, Pope John Paul II encouraged Ernesto to be “a loyal friend to all the abandoned children in the world” and confirmed his constant commitment in helping their lives.

In recognition of his solidarity actions to promote peace, he was entitled “First Class Kawkab” by king Hussein of Jordan, and the Israeli organisation “Keren Kayemeth Leisrael” dedicated to him an orchard on the hills surrounding Jerusalem.

Thanks to this constant commitment, in 1992, Ernesto received the title of “Grand’Ufficiale dell’Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana” at the hands of the former President of Italian Republic, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, and, in 1996, he was also nominated “Cavaliere di Gran Croce”. The following year, the Permanent Observer of the Holy See at the United Nations entitled him “Servitor Pacis” and many personalities, including Mother Teresa, Norberto Bobbio and Cardinal Martini, nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Ernesto Olivero is also honorary citizen of the city of Turin, Bergamo e Boves. In 1999, he then received a honorary degree in Sociology at the University of Turin and, in 2003 in Economics at the University of Salerno. He was also awarded with many different prizes for his commitment to peace, like the international prize Sant'Antonio of Padua, the prize Alta Qualità Granarolo and the Roma Prize for Peace.

In 1996, on the invitation of Paulo Evaristo Arns, Cardinal of São Paulo, Ernesto began a great mission of charity for people coming from the streets. Thus, with a small Brotherhood from Sermig, he opened the Arsenal of Hope, representing Sermig commitment for the poor of the South part of the world and for promotion of humanity through evangelism.

In 2003, on the invitation of the former Patriarch of Jerusalem, Michel Sabbah, and the bishop of Amman, Selim Sayegh, Sermig arrives in Jordan with its sisterhood and, in 2006, the Meeting Point Arsenal opens its doors to promote the education of disabled children and young people, both Christian and Muslim, and formation.

Young people are Sermig’s major concern, because of the difficulties they have to deal with in this historical period, but they are also our hope for the future, when they engage with study, commitment and voluntary work. Ernesto Olivero has always been deeply committed to offer them a life witness and values to look up to. From within the Arsenal of Peace, he asked to authorities all around the world to declare them World Heritage, and so to respect, care for and help them in their growth.

For them, he started the international movement “Giovani della Pace” (“Young for Peace”) that regularly gathers ten thousands young people to reshape the world through the new generations and peace. The first meeting took place in Turin on the 5th of October 2002 and a hundred thousand young people participated in it.

The more than 40 books that Ernesto wrote sold 1.380.000 copies and some of them have been translated into Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic and Korean. He also wrote the lyrics for eight albums produced by Sermig Sound Lab.

A friend of Ernesto wrote about him: “The best way to introduce him is describing what he has done. Since he founded Sermig, millions of people have helped millions of people. His field is faith to fight inequalities; his motto is to work in silence, with care and competence; his passion is to spread hope through actions and his rule is a union of patience and strictness. The result is good made well”.