



THE SOVEREIGN MILITARY HOSPITALLER ORDER
OF ST JOHN OF JERUSALEM, OF RHODES AND OF MALTA

MALTESE ASSOCIATION

THE HOSPITALLER

HOSPITALLER'S REPORT

15th June 2021

Dear *confrères* and *consœurs*,

I am pleased to present my sixth (6th) Hospitaller's Report, reviewing the hospitaller activities undertaken by the Association during the past year.

Whilst the necessity to hold elections in adherence to our statute has necessitated the holding of a physical meeting, this Annual General Assembly of the Members of the Association is being held outdoors at Xara Lodge rather than at our headquarters at Casa Lanfreducci. This has therefore not allowed for the visual PowerPoint presentation which I have customarily utilised to deliver my report.

The previous Annual General Assembly was held last October 27th, itself via a historic virtual meeting, so that this report only covers a shorter span of eight (8) months.

Furthermore as you all know, all our operations continue to be seriously hampered by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has wrecked so much havoc worldwide.

Thus for a second year running we have been unable to participate in the Order of Malta's Lourdes Pilgrimage as well as in the Order of Malta's Summer Camp for Disabled Youth, and in all the activities which customarily revolve around these two events. All our other local activities, such as the Ta' Pinu Pilgrimage, the Children's Christmas Party and Easter Film and the Family Fun Day to mention but a few have had to be put on hold.

We have also still been unable to restart our mainstay ongoing projects being the Refreshment Trolley Service at the Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre, the Prison Ministry at the Corradino Correctional Facility for both male as well as female foreign inmates, the visits to the elderly residents at the Sir Paul Boffa Home and the monthly Tea Parties for *malades* who have participated in past Lourdes Pilgrimages. The International Hospitallers' Conference has also been postponed for the second year running.

Yet all is not doom and gloom.

Thus together with our Salesian friends we continue to run the Alberto Marvelli Residence for Homeless Youth in Paola; and our peripheral organisation the Maltese Cross Corps continues to operate the Blessed Gerard Residence for Single Mother Migrants and their Minor Children in Gwardamangia. We also continue to support the Dar tal-Providenza Transport Project.

In terms of activities per se, thanks to generous donations received both from our Members as well as from sponsors, we have donated food supplies as well as other essential items which were packed in over 120 hampers and distributed by Members and Volunteers to a number of families in need, as well as to number of homes and institutions; and we still continue to support in this way a number of former prison inmates who participated in our Prison Ministry and who are now either out on bail or who have been released after having served their time.

Whilst we were unable to host a proper Children's Christmas Party, we have yet made it possible for a number of Christmas parties to be held for deserving children accommodated in a 10 homes and institutions, by providing party food, sweets and gifts. A total number of 180 children benefitted in this way.

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We have also taken care to mark the International Day of the Sick last February 11th, which we usually do at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Graces in Zabbar. This time Holy Mass was celebrated at Our Lady of Victories Church in Valetta by our Chaplain Fr. Brendan Gatt, and Members, Volunteers and malades were able to participate via a live transmission link.

Other, perhaps more under the radar activities, consisted in maintaining contact with and providing support to those in need; and supporting former foreign inmates at the Corradino Correctional Facility including the provision of *pro bono* legal aid services.

Finally, on June 2nd we have officially launched the Canine Search and Rescue Team, in conjunction with a Support Agreement entered into with the Working Dogs Academy. This will initially operate within the Maltese islands to serve as backup to the local government Urban Search and Rescue (“USAR”) team, primarily to provide trained canine teams in the efficient and speedy location of trapped live victims due to building collapse; but a longer term objective is for the Team to train up to International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (“INSARAG”) standards, with the final objective being official registration and approval for inclusion in the internationally recognised list. This will allow the Team to operate internationally by providing immediate assistance in case of any natural disaster occurring in any other part of the world. This exciting new project will provide good exposure to the Association, and will open up new opportunities in other related fields such as first aid. It is also hoped that it will serve to attract fresh volunteers.

I now briefly shift my focus onto our peripheral organisations, as these also fall under the Hospitaller’s general dicastery.

VOTO

I am particularly pleased with the work which the Volunteers of the Order have been carrying out during the pandemic.

In particular a number of volunteers, 20 – 25 persons strong, have been helping out at the Food Bank which is run by the Mizzi Foundation. These volunteers have been manning the Valletta distribution centre, being one of a number of other locations, on a twice weekly basis, every Monday and Thursday, on 2 hour shifts. Their work consists in distributing weekly rations to those persons in need, both individuals as well as families, who have been referred to the Food Bank by social workers. To give an idea of the sheer numbers, only last Monday I am informed that 150 individuals and families were on the distribution list at the Valletta centre. Beneficiaries also include homeless persons who are given special packs not requiring any cooking. This is Project which VOTO would like to continue even post-pandemic.

VOTO have also fundraised for a particularly challenged family comprising 2 special needs boys who are known to many of us on the Lourdes Pilgrimage. Through these laudable efforts, it was possible to finance the complete renovation of an old bathroom where it was taking up to 4 hours a day to wash the boys. Tiling works were carried out by the volunteers themselves. Appropriate medical equipment was also installed, and special walkers sourced and donated.

Finally, at the start of the pandemic shopping vouchers were also distributed to a number of former Lourdes patients; and general contact was also maintained with these persons.

OMVG

The Order of Malta Volunteers in Gozo have also had their share of activity in spite of the pandemic. Wheelchair transport services continued to be provided on a regular basis using the tail lift van belonging to the Volunteers.

A particular person has also expressed the wish to donate a single-wheelchair car for use by the Volunteers; and this matter is being actively pursued as I write out this report.

The Volunteers furthermore distribute food, on a weekly basis, to an average of 6 – 7 families in need. This is thanks to food donations received from a number of sources including the Anglican Church community in Gozo, the Gozo Craft Ladies, Caritas and Tim’s Snack Bar in Victoria.

The Volunteers also continue to collect items of clothing for despatch to the missionaries in Ghana, sending 3 containers full of such items on an annual basis. The last container was shipped out just 3 weeks ago. Items of clothing are also distributed to refugees in Gozo, and in Malta.

The Pilgrims' Service at Ta' Pinu Sanctuary is also being provided, every Wednesday. Service commenced last month of May, and will terminate towards the end of this month of June.

Contact is also kept on a regular basis with various persons in need, in particular with a person with special needs residing at Xlendi, himself a past Lourdes pilgrimage *malade*.

Finally, following a courtesy visit which the President, the Hospitaller and Mr. Chris Galea paid to His Grace the Bishop of Gozo Mgr. Anton Teuma at the Gozo Curia on a blustery April 16th this year, the pending issue concerning the allocation of a suitable Premises to the OMVG was taken up further. Contact continues between His Grace and Mr. Galea, and hopefully these will bear fruit. I am informed that potential premises in Xewkija, being the Association's natural seat in Gozo, have been earmarked.

A pending issue yet to be finalised by the OMVG is its enrolment as a Voluntary Organisation. This is a matter of importance which needs to be followed through if the OMVG is to be compliant with new provisions of law which are now in force, making it mandatory for all associations to enrol with the Office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations.

Maltese Cross Corps

As mentioned, the Maltese Cross Corps continues to successfully operate the Blessed Gerard Residence for Single Mother Migrants and their Minor Children, located at their premises in Gwardamangia. This was officially inaugurated in September last year, and is at full capacity, accommodating 3 single mother migrants and their minor children all of whom were referred by the Emigrants Commission.

A Dutch female medical doctor currently resident in Malta and who has offered her services on a voluntary basis was also introduced to the residents.

Conclusion

Insights on the Spiritual Dimension of Membership in the Order of Malta

As I come to conclude my second term in office as Hospitaller of the Maltese Association of the Sovereign Order of Malta, I felt it appropriate to share with you some of the accumulated wisdom imparted to me during the course of the XXVII International Hospitallers' Conference held in Rome between 21 – 24 March 2019. This was in fact the last such conference before the terrible COVID-19 pandemic struck the world with a vengeance.

In his address to the Hospitallers attending that conference, the Grand Chancellor H.E. Albrecht Freiherr von Boeselager, himself a former Grand Hospitaller, pointedly observed that the role of the Hospitaller goes beyond that of organising the charitable works of the Order.

The Hospitaller, as he explained, is in fact charged with a leadership function, namely that of guiding members to live up to their commitment as Members of the Order.

In the well-known parable of Lazarus, as the Grand Chancellor observed, the Rich Man never even noticed Lazarus. This was his gravest sin. It is the Hospitaller's duty to help Members of the Order to see the Lazarus on their doorsteps.

This places a huge burthen of responsibility on the shoulders of every Hospitaller, and now that we all have high hopes of finally emerging from the dark tunnel of the pandemic and resuming our activities it is this exhortation which has prompted me to conclude this particular Hospitaller's Report in this way, as an *aide memoire* to some but possibly as an *appel de réveil* to others.

In his own address to Hospitallers the Prelate H.E. the Most Reverend Monsignor Jean Lafitte, commenting upon the inseparable charisms of the Order, the well-known *tuitio fidei* and *obsequium pauperum*, referred to Holy Scripture to drive home the message that Faith without Works is useless.

Quoting from the Epistle of St. James :

“a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24); and *“ just as a body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead”* (James 2:26).

Works must of course also be carried out with Faith. In fact for Catholics the two go hand in hand, Faith itself prompting us to carry out the good Works which we perform; and this is what distinguishes the

Order, which has a confessional identity, from any other non-governmental organisation carrying out a humanitarian mission.

This is why we refer to the needy whom we charitably assist as “Our Lords the Sick”, because as Members of the Order we minister to them in a spirit of Love, as though we were tending to Our Lord Jesus Christ himself. This is very clearly borne out in Christ’s discourse on the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), which was the central topic of our Lenten Retreat held in that same year : “*Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.*”

The lamented late Prince and Grand Master Fra’ Giacomo Dalla Torre del Tempio di Sanguinetto, in his own address to the Hospitallers, reminded us of the warning given by His Holiness Pope Francis, that the cry of the poor is becoming stronger and stronger, but less and less heard every day, in a richer but increasingly indifferent world. For this reason we believers must instead continue to reach out, as Jesus does with us, for which reason the late Grand Master urged us to do more and more because human needs and miseries are great.

Finally, in the homily delivered at Holy Mass on Sunday, His Holiness the Pope’s former Special Delegate, His Eminence Cardinal Giovanni Angelo Becciu, threw guiding light on the proper spirit in which we as Members of the Order must execute the good works which we carry out, namely not for our own glorification, but for the greater glory of God Himself.

In light of all this, I considered myself duty bound to share with all of you this profound spiritual message which was transmitted to us throughout the Conference, not only that we might not take too lightly the commitments which our very membership in the Order encumbers on each one of us, but also so that we might discharge those duties in the proper context of Faith.

Acting in this manner we properly combine the *tuitio fidei* with the *obsequium pauperum*, and promote God’s glory as we pray that we may strive to do in our daily recitation of the Prayer of the Order.

In this context, our Association provides ample opportunity for each and every Knight and Dame, to carry out his or her commitments as a Member of the Order. In this we are extremely privileged.

Indeed, as this very Report and other reports which I have presented before it amply demonstrates, we already have a variety of running Projects and Activities, offering a wide range of opportunities to all members to live up to their commitment as members of the Order.

There is always more that could be done, and in Our Lord’s own words which still ring true today “the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” (Luke 10:2)

Whilst thanking each and every one of you for all that you have done during the course of my tenure, in some cases even in spite of the pandemic, I exhort you all to pick up the banner once more and to actively participate in the aforementioned hospitaller works of our Association to the fullest possible extent, without any fanfare, and within the limits of your own individual possibilities. Doing so, in the correct Christian spirit, ensures that we truly fulfil our commitment as Members of the Order both in word as well as in deed to the greater glory of God.

With confraternal best regards



Kevin F. Dingli
Hospitaller