

Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Malta

2-3 April 2022

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Press Kit

Contents

Brief History of the Church in Malta and Gozo

Facts

Papal Visit Logo & Theme Song

Official Programme

Ta' Pinu National Shrine, Gozo

St Paul's Grotto, Rabat

Mass at The Granaries, Floriana

John XXIII Peace Lab, Hal Far

Recent Church Initiatives

One Church One Journey

Contact

Brief History of the Church in Malta and Gozo



Brief History of the Church in Malta

The Church in Malta traces its origin to the shipwreck of the apostle Paul on the island in November of the year 59 AD, as recounted by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. Tradition venerates Publius, the 'protos' of the island, as the first bishop of this community.

It is, therefore, a church of apostolic foundation and remains proud of this heritage. A Pauline cult tied to various memorials, among which the Pauline grotto outside the Roman city of Melita, remains strong. Traces of a Christian presence in these early centuries can be read in catacombs, similar to those in Rome, Naples and Sicily.

Much of its history throughout the first millennium remains shrouded in the passage of time, other than sporadic mentions of bishops. In 553, a certain Julian is mentioned as the Bishop of Malta among the signatories of the *Constitutum de Tribus Capitulis*, that Pope Vigilius sent to the Council in Constantinople. Further reference to two bishops of Malta are to be found in letters of Pope Gregory the Great (590-604).

Worthy of mention is the presence of a Greek community with its Bishop during the attack on the island by Roger II in 1127, a presence that testifies to the survival of Christianity on these islands, even under Islamic occupation.

The foundation of the Cathedral in Mdina can be traced back to this Norman conquest. The period also signals the introduction of a Latin rite hierarchy, which gradually supplanted Byzantine influence in this Church.

A turning point in the island's history is signalled by the arrival of the Hospitaller Order of Saint John, which was given the island by Charles V, in 1530. Bishops now take up residence on the island and they are always chosen from among the ranks of the conventual chaplains of the order. The only Bishop of Maltese origin elected during the time of the Order was Baldassar Cagliarès (1615-1633), who also started the building of the Archbishop's Palace in Valletta, moving the seat of governance of the diocese to the new city.

Struggles over questions of jurisdiction between the Order and the Bishop arose continually. The pope sent his own representative in the person of the Inquisitor, who set up his tribunal in the Borgo, and functioned as an Apostolic Delegate, sending continual reports to Rome over the state of affairs in these islands. Two of them, Fabio Chigi and Antonio Pignatelli became Popes, as Alexander VII (1655-1667) and Innocent XII (1691-1700) respectively.

Malta during this period was truly a cosmopolitan hub. This can be clearly read in the artistic production of the time, which transformed Malta into a baroque island, a movement that shaped not only the buildings but also the cultic expression of the faith of our people.

Throughout the 19th and 20th century, the local church sent out missionaries to many parts of the world. A society of priests known as the Missionary Society of Saint Paul was founded by Mgr Joseph De Piro (1877-1933) in 1910.

Priests, religious and laypersons were forerunners in the establishment of institutes of a social nature and thus contributing to the welfare of the marginalised in society. In 1907 Saint George Preca, the first among Malta's sons to be canonised, founded the Society of Christian Doctrine, a society of laypersons committed to the Christian formation of children and adults.

In 1864, Pius IX established Gozo as a separate diocese. It has now become a suffragan see, with the establishment of the Archdiocese of Malta on 1st January 1944.

The twentieth century was marked by two religious-political struggles that characterised the Church-State relationship, first in the late 1920s, and again in the years leading to the island's independence from British colonial rule and its aftermath.

The Catholic faith undeniably constitutes one of the forging factors of our people's national identity, and Catholic traditions continue to play an important role in Maltese society, even in an increasingly secular and multicultural environment. In order to meet the challenges of the contemporary era, the Church in Malta celebrated a Diocesan Synod in the period 1999-2003, which continues to be the springboard for its pastoral plan in this present age.

The Diocese of Gozo

The shipwreck of St Paul in Malta in AD 60 marks the beginning of the relationship of the islanders with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Christianity started to flourish with the advent of the Byzantines in 535 and, in fact, there is a first reference to a diocese of Gozo in the early seventh century. It seems that the Christian faith was not eradicated from Gozo during the long Arab rule between 870 and 1127. When the Normans conquered the islands in 1127, they found a small Christian community in Gozo with their own bishop or papas.

In the following century, Gozo and Comino were integrated in the Diocese of Malta and were part of it until 1864. A first petition for the establishment of a diocese for Gozo was forwarded by Archpriest Saverio Cassar of the Gozo Matrice on 29th October 1798. This first attempt never gained ground and the request was taken seriously in hand in 1855 by two born leaders: Don Pietro Pace, a priest from Rabat then studying in Rome, and Sir Adrian Dingli, the Gozitan Crown Advocate of the Colony of British Malta. Together they did their very best to see the wishes of their fellow islanders fulfilled. Blessed Pope Pius IX finally conceded to their request and through the Bull *Singulari Amore* – 'With remarkable love' – of 16 September 1864, the islands of Gozo and Comino were separated from the Diocese of Malta and established a new diocese.

Facts



Population and ecclesiastical structure in
Malta & Gozo

Area (km²)



313

Population



516,100

Density (inhabitants/km²)



1,649

Catholics



393,696

Parishes



85

Other pastoral centres




10


Persons engaged in apostolic activities in the
Archdiocese of Malta & Diocese of Gozo

Bishops	
	4


Diocesan priests	
	426

Religious priests	
	288

Total of priests	
	714

Seminarians	
	23

Religious not priests	
	16

Nuns	
	694

Members of secular institutes	
	79

Catechists	
	1,190

Education centres owned and/or directed by the Church in Malta & Gozo

Schools

Kindergartens



25

Primary or elementary



51

Secondary schools



24

Post-secondary institutions



2

Higher institutions



2

Faculty of Theology at the University of Malta



1

Students

Kindergartens



1,077

Primary or elementary



7,540

Secondary schools



8,269

Post-secondary institutions



772

Higher institutions



205

Faculty of Theology at the University of Malta



142

**Charitable and social centres owned and/or directed by
the Church in Malta & Gozo**

Homes for the elderly and for people with special needs



20

Residential homes for children and child welfare centres



16

**Marriage/Family counselling centres and centres
for the protection of life**



13

**Shelters for victims of violence and for
rehabilitation of drug abusers**



9

Other institutions



30

Persons assisted in 2021

Homes for the elderly and for people with special needs



983

Residential homes for children and child welfare centres



163

Marriage/Family counselling centres and centres
for the protection of life



4,709

Shelters for victims of violence and for
rehabilitation of drug abusers



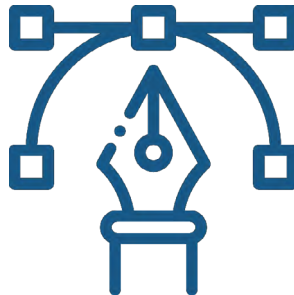
305

Other institutions



900

Papal Visit Logo & Theme Song





The visit's logo features hands uplifted towards the Cross as they emerge from a boat battling the waves. The hands are receiving the good news of Christ delivered by St Paul to the Maltese islands and they represent the welcome that the Maltese extend to Christ in their neighbour, as well as the help that they give to those in difficulty. The boat reminds us of the dramatic narrative of the Apostle Paul's shipwreck on the island of Malta (see Acts 27:27-44) and the welcome that he and all those with him received from the Maltese. The motto for the Apostolic Journey to Malta is "They showed us unusual kindness" (Acts 28:2).

The visit's logo chosen by the bishops is designed by Matthew Urpani, a young doctor and graphic designer. This logo can only be used with the authorisation of the Archbishop's Curia.



Il logo della visita mostra delle mani che si indirizzano verso la croce, provenienti da una nave in balia delle onde. Le mani rappresentano un segno di accoglienza del cristiano verso il prossimo e l'assistenza a coloro che sono in difficoltà, abbandonati al loro destino. La barca rammenta il drammatico racconto del naufragio dell'apostolo Paolo sull'isola di Malta (cfr At 27:27-44) e l'accoglienza riservata dai maltesi all'apostolo e ai naufraghi (cfr At 28:1-10). Il motto del viaggio apostolico è "Ci trattarono una rara umanità" (Acts 28:2).

Il logo della visita scelto dai vescovi è stato disegnato da Matthew Urpani, un giovane medico e graphic designer. Questo logo può essere utilizzato solo con l'autorizzazione della Curia Arcivescovile.



IL-PAPA FRANĠISKU

F'MALTA

"Ġabu ruħhom magħna bi hlewwa liema bħalha" Atti 28,2

2-3 ta' April 2022

Il-logo taż-żjara tal-Papa juri jdejn merfugħa lejn is-salib, heġġin minn ġo dgħajsa titħabat mal-mewġ. L-idejn qed jilqgħu l-aħbar it-tajba ta' Kristu li wassal San Pawl fil-għejjer Maltin u jirrappreżentaw ukoll l-akkoljenza tal-Maltin ma' Kristu fil-proxxmu u l-għajnuna li jagħtu lil dawk li jinsabu f'diffikultà. Id-dgħajsa tfakkarna fir-rakkont drammatiku tan-nawfragġu tal-Appostlu Pawlu fuq il-gżira ta' Malta (ara Atti 27:27-44) u l-laqqgħa li l-Maltin taw lill-Appostlu u lil dawk kollha li miegħu salvaw mill-baħar (ara Atti 28:1-10). Il-motto tal-Vjaġġ Appostoliku f'Malta hu "Ġabu ruħhom magħna bi hlewwa liema bħalha" (Atti 28:2).

Il-logo taż-żjara magħżul mill-isqfijiet huwa ddizinjat minn Matthew Urpani, tabib żagħżuġ u graphic designer. Dan il-logo jista' jintuza biss bl-awtorizzazzjoni tal-Kurja tal-Arċisqof.

Welcome Here - Fr Rob Galea feat. Michela

Deeper than the seas
Stronger than awarded bravery
Richer than our history
Bigger than our dreams could ever be

There's a love
The whole world knows
It's a love that's kind to all

You're welcome here
Let your love rain down
Into our hearts again

(Yeah) You are welcome here
Lord we lay it down
Let this land be yours again

Teach us generosity
And kindness that will welcome those in need
A people of integrity
That stand for life
And human dignity

There's a love
The whole world knows
It's a love that's kind to all

Alleluia
Together in this land
Alleluia
We sing

Alleluia
On Christ the Rock we stand
Alleluia
We sing

Music and lyrics: Fr Rob Galea

Official Programme



The programme of Pope Francis' Apostolic Journey to Malta as released by the Holy See Press Office on the 25th February 2022. All times listed are in Central European Summer Time.

Saturday 2nd April 2022

- | | | |
|-------|---|----------------------------|
| 08:30 | Departure by aeroplane from Rome/Fiumicino International Airport to Malta | |
| 10:00 | Arrival at Malta International Airport | |
| 10:00 | Welcome ceremony at Malta International Airport | |
| 10:50 | Courtesy Visit to the President of the Republic in the Ambassadors' Chamber of the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta | |
| 11:35 | Meeting with the Prime Minister in the Pages' Chamber of the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta | |
| 11:50 | Meeting with the Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps in the "Grand Council Chamber" of the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta | Address of the Holy Father |
| 15:50 | Departure by catamaran from the Grand Harbour of Valletta to Gozo | |
| 17:00 | Arrival at the Port of Mgarr | |
| 17:30 | Prayer meeting at the National Shrine of Ta' Pinu in Gozo | Homily of the Holy Father |
| 18:45 | Departure by ferry from the Port of Mgarr to Malta | |
| 19:30 | Arrival at the Port of Ċirkewwa and transfer to the Apostolic Nunciature in Rabat | |

Sunday 3rd April 2022

- | | | |
|-------|---|-------------------------------------|
| 07:45 | Private meeting with the Members of the Society of Jesus at the Apostolic Nunciature in Rabat | |
| 08:30 | Visit to the Grotto of St Paul at the Basilica of St Paul in Rabat | Prayer of the Holy Father |
| 10:15 | Holy Mass at the Granaries in Floriana | Homily of the Holy Father & Angelus |
| 16:45 | Meeting with migrants at the John XXIII Migrants' Centre in Ħal Far | Address of the Holy Father |
| 17:50 | Farewell ceremony at Malta International Airport | |
| 18:15 | Departure by aeroplane to Rome | |
| 19:40 | Arrival at Fiumicino International Airport in Rome | |

Ta' Pinu National Shrine, Gozo



Ta' Pinu National Shrine, Gozo

The origins of this Marian Shrine go back to the beginning of the 15th century, when the family of Giovanni Calimera raised a church on a knoll in the midst of their property within il-Wied ta' Għammar, the same spot where it still stands. It was dedicated to the Assumption – and known as Santa Maria ta' Calimera. It eventually became known as Ta' Gentile, after Gentile Calimera. In 1615, Pinu Gauci, from whom the chapel took its present title, offered the Bishop to raise it anew. In 1619, he commissioned the present altarpiece of the Assumption, the work of Bartolomeo Amodeo Perugino.

In mid-morning of 22nd June 1883, Karmni Grima, returning home from her fields, heard a mysterious voice apparently coming from the direction of the chapel: *“Come! Come!”*. The voice then invited her: *“Recite three Hail Marys in honour of the three days that my body rested in the tomb”*, a practice still very popular with Gozitans today. All of a sudden, following this Call of Our Lady to Carmela and eventually also Francesco Portelli, all roads began leading towards Ta' Pinu. The constant stream of pilgrimages never ceased to flow. The foundation stone of the present Shrine, built in elegant Neo-Romanesque and Gothic style with local limestone, was laid on 30 May 1920, and the Basilica was dedicated on 13 December 1931.

In 1935, Cardinal Alessandro Maria Lepicier, the Pope's Legate, crowned the Virgin's altarpiece. On 26 May 1990, Pope St John Paul II visited the Shrine and celebrated Holy Mass on its parvis, placing five golden stars around the Virgin's head in the painting. Pope Benedict XVI, during his Visit to Malta in 2021, at the end of a Mass at the Floriana Granaries, offered the Golden Rose to Our Lady of Ta' Pinu and invoked her as 'Queen of the Family'.



St Paul's Grotto, Rabat



St Paul's Grotto, Rabat (Malta)

The Grotto of St Paul has been venerated since medieval times as the place just outside the city of Melite where the Saint is said to have stayed during his sojourn in Malta in 60 AD, as described in the Acts of the Apostles. The earliest surviving medieval documented reference to the Grotto of St Paul refers to the Church of St Paul de crypta, as well as the cemetery of St Paul and the fossatura or ditch near the Church of St Paul. This, dates to 1366 when Bishop Ylario granted Bochius de Bochio land belonging to the Church of St Paul.

In the Catholic Counter-Reformation tradition, a powerful awakening of the cult of St Paul started with the Spanish hermit Juan Benegas of Cordoba who lived in the area of the Grotto and who in 1607 obtained Pope Paul V's permission to look after it.

The Knights of the Order of St John, who also set their eyes on this important site, backed Benegas in his efforts concerning the Grotto. The Knights soon realised the potential of the Pauline cult in Malta which offered them the privilege of curating such a holy site not just for religious reasons, but also for political purposes. In 1617 Benegas willingly ceded the Grotto and all acquisitions to the Order. Benegas remained important to the cult of St Paul in Malta until he departed from the island in 1622. He later died in Rome in 1644.

The Grand Master at the time was Alof De Wignacourt who saw the need to build a Collegio to establish a College of Chaplains, generally under a rector who was a Knight chosen by the Grand Master, to maintain the Grotto of St Paul. These were also known as the Chaplains of the Order of Obedience. The mission of these Chaplains was to promote the devotion of St Paul as well as to preserve and protect the Grotto. Benegas was rightly appointed as the first rector of the Collegio and was also made a Knight of Obedience. The Knights, together with Benegas, were then responsible to make the site more accommodating to pilgrims. For this reason, they started by adding a number of side altars close to the Grotto, as well as a sanctuary dedicated to St Publius above it. The underground complex includes the Grotto and a rock-cut crypt attached to it which contains two altars respectively dedicated to St Paul and St Luke, and a smaller side altar dedicated to St Trophimus.

The marble statue of St Paul in the Grotto was donated by Grand Master Pinto in 1748. Another statue of St Paul on the main altar of the Crypt was sculpted in marble by the renowned Maltese sculptor, Melchiorre Gafà, who, during his brief career, became an important Baroque sculptor in Rome.



A silver vessel, executed in 1960 for the 19th centenary anniversary of the shipwreck of St Paul in Malta, hangs next to the marble statue in the Grotto. This was also donated by the Knights of St John.

The Grotto became a pivotal place of worship and pilgrimage. Several important personalities visited the site throughout the centuries. These included Inquisitor Mgr Fabio Chigi (later Pope Alexander VII), Admiral Lord Nelson, Saint Pope John Paul II in 1990 and Pope Benedict XVI in 2010.

Sanctuary of St Publius

When St Paul was on the island, he performed several miracles such as the miracle of the viper and several healings. One person St Paul healed was Publius' father. St Publius was the prefect of Malta and was made Malta's first bishop. It is to him that this church is dedicated.

The Sanctuary of St Publius was added on to the Church of St Paul in 1617 and was built by the Knights of the Order of St John. The main altarpiece is the work of Mattia Preti and shows the Virgin Mother holding the infant Jesus clutching the eight-pointed cross. She is flanked by the patron saint of the Order and by St Publius.

In 1962, the Grotto of St Paul was reunited with the adjacent Parish Church of St Paul.

Basilica of St Paul

The parish church of St Paul in Rabat is just outside the old capital city of Mdina. It was the first church built on the site where it is believed that St Paul stayed during his three-month sojourn in Malta and where he preached and healed the sick, as described in the Acts of the Apostles. The earliest surviving medieval documented reference to the church of St Paul de crypta, as well as the cemetery of St Paul and the fossatura or ditch near the church of St Paul, dates to 1366 when Bishop Ylario granted Bochijs de Bochio land belonging to the church of St Paul.

The church found today is the last one of several successive ones that were built on-site. In 1555, the building of a new church was carried out on the instructions of Bishop Mons Domenico Cubelles and later, in 1575, this was enlarged by Archpriest De Agathiis. In 1653, the Maltese noblewoman Cosmana Navarra, at her expense and out of her great devotion to St Paul, commissioned architect Francesco Buonamici to design a new Baroque church in the form of a Latin Cross. Construction works lasted 30 years. These were concluded in 1683 by the building of the dome under the design and guidance of the Maltese architect Lorenzo Gafà.

Cosmana Navarra endowed the church with further works of art such as a marble high altar now in the side chapel of St Stephen, a titular painting showing the providential Shipwreck of St Paul painted by Stefano Erardi, and other paintings by Mattia Preti and Michelangelo Marulli. All essential liturgical accessories, such as silver and bronze votive lamps, were commissioned by the same benefactress. She kept the side chapel, dedicated to St Anthony the Abbott, as her family's chapel. Cosmana Navarra is buried there and a commemorative monument was placed in her memory in 2016.

The church has 13 altars and an oratory annexed to it. It is also annexed to the Grotto of St Paul and to the Church of St Publius. Under the main altarpiece rests a copy of the old titular polyptych painting showing St Paul in the centre flanked by four other paintings showing important instances from his life. The original painting, now found in the parish museum, namely, the Wignacourt Museum, was painted for the previous church in 1588.

The titular statue of St Paul was sculpted in wood by Giovanni Caruana in 1771. The church ceiling and dome are the work of the 20th-century artist from Brescia, Eliodoro Coccoli, while the Via Crucis in bronze is the work of the Italian sculptor, Giannino Castiglioni.

The façade of the church, designed by Buonamici, enshrines the three sacred places found on site. The main door leads to the Basilica, while the door on the right-hand side leads to the Church of St Publius and the Grotto, and the door on the left-hand side leads to the Grotto's cemetery that includes the Sacro Monte, the place held as St Paul's preaching spot, where a stone statue of St Paul was installed by Cosmana Navarra in 1679.

The current church's dome was built in 1926 according to the design of architect Robert Galea. It replaced the previous one built in 1919 which rested on the original Gafà dome, and which had tragically crumbled in 1924 after serious damage resulted following a 1923 earthquake that hit the island.

The Collegiate Parish Church of St Paul in Rabat was elevated to the title of Minor Basilica by Pope Francis on 4th April 2020.



List of Church and other entities present at the Basilica of St Paul in Rabat

Caritas Malta - Strives to eradicate poverty, works in favour of social justice and human development. The organisation specialises in residential therapeutic centres for substance abuse and other psychosocial support to the most vulnerable.

More information: caritasmalta.org

Dar Bjorn - Helps people with ALS, MS and other neurological conditions through 24/7 nursing care and specialised treatment.

More information: darbjorn.com

Dar Frate Jacoba - Offers hospitality to youth and people coming from any social environment and are ready to integrate within the community.

More information: youthalivefoundation.com

Dar Hosea - Reaches out to vulnerable women who are exploited into prostitution, by offering the support and assistance that are required.

More information: darhosea.org

Dar Merħba Bik - Provides adequate safe shelter to women and their children who have experienced domestic violence and help them establish a way of life which best meets their needs and their potential.

More information: darmerhbabik.org

Dar Saura - One of the Church Homes for the Elderly within the Archdiocese of Malta

Dar tal-Providenza - Provides residential services to persons with disabilities.

More information: dartalprovidenza.org

Fondazzjoni Sebh - Accompanies children and families in their journey towards reaching their full potential by providing community, residential, and educational therapeutic services.

More information: sebh.mt

Il-Hidma ta' Caritas Djakonija fil-Parroċċi - Aims to coordinate and strengthen the sterling work carried out by volunteers in the different parishes. This is achieved through a number of formative and active initiatives that bring together parish priests, parish operators and professionals from diocesan entities.

More information: djakonija.org

Richmond Foundation - Supports people experiencing mental health problems and those around them, throughout various aspects of life.

More information: richmond.org.mt

St Jean Antide Foundation - Provides professional support services to very vulnerable individuals and families who are suffering due to very difficult life circumstances and those who are sliding into poverty and are socially excluded.

More information: antidemalta.org

Suret il-Bniedem - Provides shelter to homeless people in Malta.

More information: facebook.com/fsib99

Mass at The Granaries, Floriana



Papal Mass

Readings

First Reading - Isaiah 43:16-21 - Dennis Buttigieg (in Maltese)

Psalm 125 - Fr Jethro Bajada OFM Cap & Sr Rachel Camilleri ASJM (in Maltese)

Second Reading - Philippians 3:8-14 - Margaret Micallef (in Maltese)

Gospel - John 8:1-11 - Rev. Robert Calleja OFM Conv

Prayers of the Faithful

Grace Vella Teggart (in English)

For the pilgrim Church in the world: that she may live with fidelity the precept of love and spread the light of Christ in the heart of every person.

(Per la Chiesa pellegrina nel mondo: viva fedelmente il comandamento dell'amore, e diffonda la luce di Cristo nel cuore di ogni uomo.)

Paolo Lugo (in Italian)

Per il Santo Padre, Papa Francesco: il Signore continui a conservarlo in salute e ad ispirarlo nel discernimento, per poter guidare la Chiesa, segno di speranza per tutti gli uomini.

Leela Sanjolucy (in Malayalam)

ഭൂവാധിപതിമാരെ, എല്ലാ രാഷ്ട്രങ്ങളും ഭരണകൂടങ്ങളും എല്ലാക്കാലത്തും ജനങ്ങൾ ഒഴിവാക്കി, ജനനന്മ മാത്രം ക്ഷമയും, ഓരോ വ്യക്തിയുടേയും നെ ആദരിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തുകൊണ്ട് ഭരണം നയിക്കുവേണ്ട കൃപ അവർക്ക് നൽകണമെ ഞങ്ങളോടും ഞങ്ങൾ പ്രാർത്ഥിക്കുന്നു.

(Per i governanti e i capi delle nazioni: promuovano sempre il bene comune, evitando ogni conflitto e rispettando la dignità di ogni persona.)

Nur Ciappara (in Arabic)

بحرحل او فن عل اي احض ل ج أ ن م ي ل ص ن
ار د ه م ه و ا م د و م ه ع و م د ب ه ذ ت ال ي ح
م ال س ل او ق و خ ال ا ن م د ه ع ن ي ش د ت ق ي ل م ع ل ج ع ت ل ب

(Per le vittime della violenza e della guerra: le loro lacrime e il loro sangue non siano sparsi invano, ma affrettino un'era di fraternità e di pace.)

Martha Cutajar (in Polish)

Za rodziny: aby żyły na wzór ludzkości pojednanej w miłości i promieniowały wokół siebie ducha Ewangelii.

(Per le famiglie: realizzino al loro interno il modello di una umanità riconciliata nell'amore e irradiano intorno a sé lo spirito del Vangelo.)

Dante Bacalla Sarita (in Tagalog)

Sapagkat tayong lahat ay nagtipon dito at ang ating simbahan sa Malta na ang pakikipag-isa kay Kristo, masunuring lingkod, ay nagbibigay sa atin ng muling pagtuklas ng tunay na kalayaan ng mga anak ng Dios.

(Per noi qui presenti e la nostra Chiesa di Malta: la comunione con Cristo, servo obbediente, ci doni di ritrovare la nostra vera libertà di figli.)

Offertory

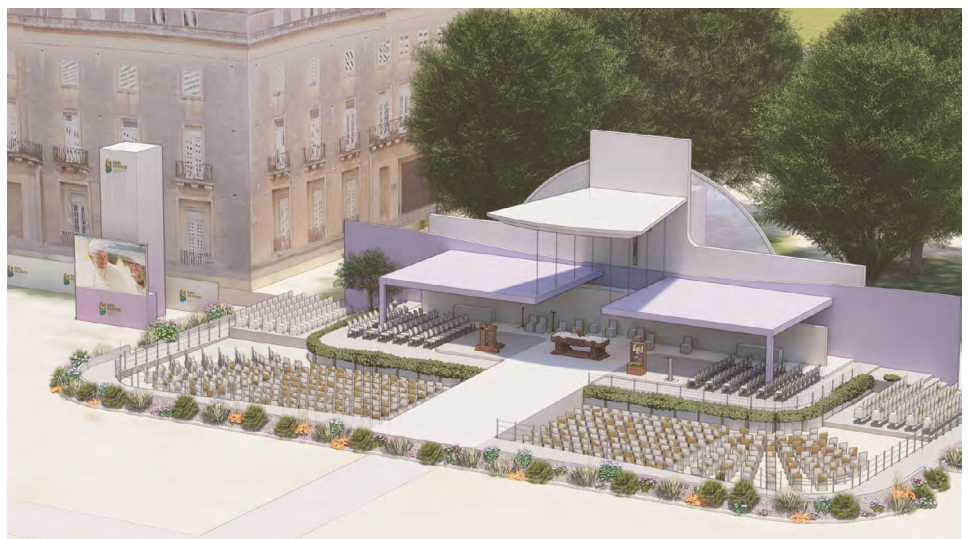
Pauline Attard
Sr Angelica Bezzina
Emma Bishop
Gerrard Camilleri
Luke Camilleri
Antoinette Cutajar
Matteo Grima
Sr Francis Hilary Warrington
Karin Magri
Sr Anna Mallia
Stephanie Pace
Sylvia Riolo

The Papal Platform

The platform has been designed by artistic director Carlo Schembri. The design is inspired by the form of the crucifix, with the circle and rays emanating from it representing the Eucharist. It is 16 metres wide and 14 metres deep. Around 600 priests will be on the platform to concelebrate Mass with the Pope.

As the Pope's visit will take place during Lent, the colour purple will dominate, it being the liturgical colour used during the 40 days of Lent. Instead of flowers, flora found in Malta and also mentioned in the Bible will surround the platform.

At the centre of the platform, there will be a crucifix made locally, probably towards the end of the 19th century, and known traditionally as 'Kristu tal-Gogi'. The crucifix is found in the chapel at the Archbishop's Curia in Floriana and belongs to the church dedicated to St Nicholas ('Tal-Erwieħ') in Valletta. Similar crucifixes were used during the traditional three-hour sermon on Good Friday, as it was possible for the arms of Christ to be released from the cross and for the body to be lowered as though for burial, to be placed for public veneration.



The Icon of Our Lady of Damascus

At the Greek-Catholic church of Our Lady of Damascus, in Archbishop Street, Valletta, one has the opportunity to venerate two religious treasures, namely the wonder-working 12th century icon of Our Lady of Damascus (Damaskiní) and the 13th-14th century icon of 'Our Lady of Mercy' (Eleimoníttria). The icon of Our Lady of Damascus is named after the capital city of Syria, Damascus, where it was greatly venerated. The icon is said to have reached the Greek island of Rhodes in 1475 under miraculous circumstances. During the Ottoman siege of Rhodes, both the Damaskiní and the Eleimoníttria were housed at the church of St Demetrius, inside the city walls. When Rhodes fell to the Turks, the Knights of St John had no other option but to leave the Greek island on the 1st January 1523. For seven long years, the icons of the Damaskiní and the Eleimoníttria travelled with the Knights to Candia (Crete), Messina, Civitavecchia, Rome and Viterbo.

Both icons arrived in Malta with the Knights of St John in 1530. Accompanying them was a contingent of around 500 expatriate Greeks from Rhodes. The two icons belonged to the distinguished Calamias family. When Ioanna married Nikolaos Calamias, the son of Papàs Dikeos Calamias, a part of her dowry consisted of the two icons and their respective churches. Nikolaos later became a priest and died before the Ottoman siege of Rhodes. It was Ioanna, his widow, who brought the two icons to Malta on the Gran Carracca Sant'Anna.

Upon arrival in Malta the Greeks were assigned three churches in Borgo del Castello, present-day Vittoriosa, that of St Catherine, renamed Our Lady of Damascus, because the icon was housed there, that of St Agatha, renamed St Anthony, where the Eleimonitria was kept, and the church of St Nicholas, renamed St George.

The Knights of St John and the Maltese nurtured a great devotion towards the two icons. During the Great Siege of 1565, Grand Master Jean Parisot de la Valette, prayed regularly to Our Lady of Damascus, in front of her ancient icon. When the Knights, with the heroic resistance of the Maltese population, managed to ward off the Ottoman threat, Grand Master la Valette called at the Church of Our Lady of Damascus to pray before the icon. He expressed his gratitude by donating his hat and his sword to the church as a votive offering. From there, he and the rest of the knights proceeded to the church St Lawrence for a solemn service of thanksgiving. This event was commemorated by Grand Master Emanuel de Rohan by means of a marble plaque when the chapel was restored in 1779.

When the new city of Valletta was being built, Ioannes Calamias, the son of Ioanna, commissioned the building of a church to house the two icons; it was ready by 1580. In 1587, the icon of Our lady of Damascus was brought over to Valletta from Vittoriosa in great pomp and ceremony on one of the galleys of the Order of St John.

Apart from La Valette, other Grand Masters expressed their devotion to Our Lady of Damascus. These included Pietro del Monte, who donated the site for the building of the new church in Valletta, Nicholas Cotoner, who wanted a larger and more elaborate church to house the precious icon of the Virgin, and Gregorio Caraffa, who provided all the necessary elements required for liturgical celebration.

On 25th October 1931, the icon of Our Lady of Damascus was solemnly crowned by the Vatican Chapter on the occasion of the fifteenth centenary of the Council of Ephesus which proclaimed the Blessed Virgin as the Theotokos, that is 'the Birth-giver of Christ God'. That same year coincided with the fourth centenary of the arrival of the icon of the Damaskiní to Malta.

On 24th March 1942, the church of Our Lady of Damascus was destroyed by enemy action. Around thirty icons were lost forever. Fortunately, the Damaskiní had been taken to the Freres in Gzira for safekeeping and, therefore, it suffered no harm. Unfortunately, the other icon, the Eleimonitria, was left in the church and was badly damaged. It was competently restored in the 1980s at the National Museum of Fine Arts and can now be venerated along with other icons housed at the Greek-Catholic church.

Because of its old age and chequered history, the icon of Our Lady of Damascus was in a very poor state of preservation. Already in 1930 it had undergone urgent restoration at the hands of the two brothers, Vincenzo and Carmelo Bonello. Between 1963 and 1966 the icon was meticulously cleaned and restored in the Central Institute of Art Restoration, in Rome, at the expense of the Italian government. The patient work of the restorers, who removed layers of grime and successive over-paintings accumulated during the centuries, brought the picture back to its original beauty. The icon was given a prominent place in the Thirteenth Council of Europe Exhibition held in Malta from 2nd April to 1st July 1970.

Starting in 2018, research and restoration works on the icon of Our Lady of Damascus have been carried out by a highly qualified team of restorers of the Atelier del Restauro, led by Dr Maria Grazia Zenzani and Ms Valentina Lupo. This much-needed intervention has gone a long way in restoring the icon to its former beauty.

The icon of Our Lady of Damascus is of the type known as Eleousa, ‘the Merciful’, similar, in some respects, to the well-known Madonna of Vladimir (XII century, School of Constantinople), permanently exhibited in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. An icon of the Eleousa type is recognized by the very close and tender union of the Theotokos and her Divine Infant.

The Our Lady of Damascus icon measures 147.5x102.5cm. while that of the Virgin of Vladimir is only 78.1x54.6 cm. David Talbot Rice, Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Edinburgh and author of Byzantine Art, considers the icon of Our Lady of Damascus “a thing of great beauty and historical importance in addition to being an expression of faith”. He is inclined to believe that it is even older than the Virgin of Vladimir, i.e. earlier than the 12th century.

The Madonna wears the mantle of a Byzantine Empress. The three stars, one on each shoulder and one on the forehead, symbolise her virginity before, during and after the birth of the Child Jesus, and of her consecration as a unique co-operator in the mystery of the Divine Incarnation. The Baby’s robe is tied by a red sash, a colour often used to signify divinity. The face of the Madonna dominates the whole composition. The eyes, very large and with a fixed expression, seem to gaze beyond and into the eyes of the person praying. The thin nose, which is delicately carved, and the high broad forehead stress the predominance of contemplative life. The dynamism of the gaze is eloquently emphasised by the composed immobility of the whole body. All anxiety and gesticulation fade before interior peace. The icon of the Damaskiní illustrates the gradual tendency of Byzantine art, at the time of the Comnenes, to emphasise the personal, intimate relationship between Mother and Child.

It can be said of icons in general that they witness to the heavenly glory which is manifested in the figures represented on the gold background. The heavenly archetypes, which they represent, charge them with something of their own power. These icons are, for the faithful, support and means of approaching the divine splendour. The icon, then, is not only an aesthetic object but a “channel of divine grace”.



John XXIII Peace Lab, Hal Far



John XXIII Peace Laboratory

The Peace Lab is a voluntary organisation which was inaugurated by Giuseppe Roncalli, the brother of Pope John XXIII on 25th March 1971.

The founder of the Peace Lab, Fr Dionysius Mintoff who is a Franciscan friar, believed deeply in the need for an open and unrestricted meeting-place, where people of all backgrounds and attitudes could come together. In 1971, Fr Mintoff led a group which carried out educational and practical work to strive for social justice and human rights. They embarked on an experiment in fostering solidarity and moral values based on Christian beliefs, without excluding any other belief.

The Peace Lab is based in Ħal Far in a site which was originally part of an airfield which saw intensive air combats during World War II. It includes a church and a number of rooms, surrounded by extensive gardens.

The change from a military station to a peace centre was the result of direct political action. The John XXIII Peace Lab is a practical example of the role that a voluntary organisation can play in shaping the conscience and opinion of others.

Over the years, the Peace Lab has been offering shelter and hospitality to a number of migrants and refugees from Mali, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ivory Coast, Sudan, Cameroon, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Iran.



The Migrants Commission of the Archdiocese of Malta

In the 1950s, the Malta Catholic Action founded the Malta Emigrants Commission to assist the Maltese who were seeking a new life away from our shores in other countries. The Maltese Migrants Centre operated from Palazzo Caraffa from 1963.

In 1971, Dar l-Emigrant was inaugurated. A year later, Malta accepted her first refugees upon the request of the UNHCR: 362 persons from Uganda. In 1987, the Commission became an official Operational Partner of the UNHCR.

Dar l-Emigrant has housed migrant and refugee services since. In the 1990s, various waves of migrants sought asylum in Malta: from Albania, ex-Yugoslavia, North and Sub-Saharan Africa. The Commission was crucial in offering aid and in some cases helping in their relocation to other countries.

The Commission continues this work today by running 11 residences that welcome migrants, offering legal aid to asylum seekers, and social assistance to those most in need.

In 2021, the Commission was renamed Migrants Commission, and renewed its commitment to serving migrants. Through collaboration with state agencies and international and local NGOs, the Migrants Commission seeks to welcome, protect, promote and integrate all migrants in Malta. The Church in Malta, through the Migrants Commission, works towards creating spaces for dialogue and encounters while initiating and collaborating in educational and cultural programmes which counter racist and xenophobic narratives and behaviours.

More information about the Migrants Commission is available at migrants.mt.

For recent figures on migrants' arrivals and asylum data in Malta, covering January to December 2021, view the UNHCR's latest factsheet.

Recent Church Initiatives



Proġett Kenn - Home-hosting programme for homeless migrants

Launched in March 2022, Proġett Kenn is about overcoming obstacles that lead to the exclusion of migrants from the socio-cultural fabric of Maltese society.

The rationale behind this proposal is to create an opportunity for both migrants who need accommodation and families in Malta who are willing to host migrants in their own home for three months with a possibility of extending up to six months. This will facilitate the integration process of migrants into Maltese society.

The project will be providing:

- Migrants with basic assistance through accommodation
- Migrants and the hosting families with the opportunity to get to know and understand each other's culture(s), customs and traditions, thus understanding the dynamics of integration from the perspective of lived experience; and
- A space which encourages peaceful inter-cultural dialogue and negotiation through the sharing of the lived-in space.

The project will be subdivided into 3 modes:

- Hosting at a family home
- Hosting in a private residence made available by the owner for this project
- Providing support and assistance to families who are hosting.

Who is eligible?

Migrants will be identified by social workers or a professional working in the caring field. Priority will be given to the following migrants who are homeless and in the 18-20 year old age group, living in detention and/or open centres and willing to:

- Learn about what integration looks like in Maltese society;
- Cooperate with a host family;
- Pursue their studies and/or seek a job; and
- Work towards independent living.

Who can qualify as a host family?

The success of this project depends on the availability of families and individuals who are willing to open their homes for someone seeking refuge in Malta. Families and/or individuals who:

- Have adequate hosting facilities;
- Are willing to engage with support staff from assessment, training, to follow-ups; and
- Are willing to host with the understanding that there is no remuneration for such a service.

More information about the Migrants Commission is available at migrants.mt.

St Michael Hospice

In 2019, the Archdiocese of Malta handed over the Church premises known as Adelaide Cini Institute in St Venera to Hospice Malta, a local NGO which provides free of charge patient-centered palliative care, for the establishment of St Michael Hospice, the first state-of-the-art complex in Malta to provide comprehensive palliative care.

The Church property, including the existing building and gardens cover a total floor area of 11,000 square metres and is valued at around €8 million, with much more funds needed to renovate the complex over the coming years.

Archbishop Charles Jude Scicluna said that this initiative was inspired by the Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis in 2015. “St Michael Hospice will be a place in which the door of mercy will never close, reminding us of God’s tangible mercy in our lives.” The Archbishop stated that this project is a timely reminder of the right to life and the dignity of the human person.

Through St Michael Hospice complex, Hospice Malta will expand its present community services to over 10,000 visits per year to patients and their families. With the increase in space, the new premises will also allow for an expansion of the present Day Therapy services from the current 700 sessions to over 2,000 sessions annually as well as the provision of new therapies and services.

The ultimate objective of the enhancement of the community palliative care services offered by Hospice is to allow patients to remain in their own homes in the community at this most vulnerable time and in turn to reduce the burden through the avoidance of unnecessary referrals to hospital. St Michael Hospice will also offer an in-patient unit facility to cater for such needs.

Educational training courses for the continuous development of Hospice professional care team as well as other Health Care professionals will also be delivered from the Education Department to be developed within St Michael Hospice in Santa Venera.

Information about Hospice Malta

For 30 years since its foundation in 1989, Hospice Malta’s primary role has been the provision and promotion of palliative care services to patients suffering from cancer, motor-neuron disease, and end-of-life cardiac, respiratory, renal and liver diseases. These services are offered through a professional interdisciplinary team. The patient and family-centred care offered targets the relief of pain and other physical symptoms as well as emotional, psycho-social and spiritual issues.

More information at hospicemalta.org.

Aerial view of Adelaide Cini Institute



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Official website of the Apostolic Journey
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