



# THE MALTESE PRESENCE IN NORTH AMERICA

## E-NEWSLETTER

Issue 78

DECEMBER 2025

### CHRISTMAS WITH SANTA AT THE MALTESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY CLUB OF DEARBORN, MICHIGAN



**Santa with all the children, Saturday, December 6th**

Photo courtesy of Margaret Muscat Purdy  
See pages 12-16 for more.

## Maltese Presence in North America

Issue No. 78  
December 2025

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## EDITORIAL COMMENT

Like the months of October-November, a lot has been happening within the various clubs and diplomatic organizations during November-December.

There has been a food fair (page 6), a market craft show (pages 7-11), a book launch (pages 17-18) and a concert (page 5). Then, there have been several Christmas parties (pages 12, 12-16, 19-21, 22-24, 31-37, 38). The staff of the Maltese Embassy in Washington, DC continue to make its presence known (pages 6, 25-26, 26-27, 30). Then there is the Christmas message by Malta's Prime Minister Robert Abela to the Maltese communities living abroad (pages 29-30).

The passing of the irreplaceable Mark Caruana of New South Wales, Australia has touched the hearts of the Maltese and those of Maltese blood worldwide. Two tributes from our readers appear in this issue (pages 38, 41).

Meanwhile, Dr. Raymond Xerri, a native of New York City and former Consul General of Malta to Canada, is the driving force behind "100 Proposals for the Gozitan Islands" (pages 27-28). More relating to these exciting proposals will be seen in the January 2026 issue.

Owing to the kindness and efforts of Evelyn and Dennis Simmons of California, all issues and the latest "Table of Contents" are posted on the web page of the Maltese-American Social Club of San Francisco at <http://maltese-americanscsf.org/home.aspx>.

Click on to "News & Resources."

If you have ideas to share, wish to be put on the free, bcc electronic mailing lists, would like to learn the newsletter's advertising rates, etc., I may be reached at [danbrock62@gmail.com](mailto:danbrock62@gmail.com).

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## ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE MALTESE COMMUNITIES

Dan Brock

### CALIFORNIA

The **Children's Christmas Party** was held on Saturday, December 6<sup>th</sup>. (See page 12.)

The **New Year's Eve Dinner/Dance** will take place on Wednesday, December 31<sup>st</sup>.

### MICHIGAN

#### Maltese American Benevolent Society, Inc.

At 2:00 p.m., Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, the **Children's Christmas Party** was held. (See pages 19-21.)

A **New Year's Eve Potluck Dinner** will take place at 7:00 p.m., Wednesday, December 31<sup>st</sup>.



#### Maltese American Community Club of Dearborn

The **Annual Holiday Market Craft Show** was held on Sunday, November 30<sup>th</sup>. (See pages 6-11.)

A **Christmas Party with Santa** took place on Saturday, December 6<sup>th</sup>. (See pages 1, 12-16.)

The **First Friday Mass**, with **Fr. Joe** as celebrant, will be celebrated on Friday, January 9<sup>th</sup>. The **Dinner** will follow the traditional First Friday menu.

### NEW YORK CITY

#### Maltese Center NYC

The **Maltese Center Giving Tree** for the **Ronald Mc Donald House** was displayed with tags. Each tag included an item needed by a pediatric cancer patient (clothes, hats, diapers). Donations were collected through December 20<sup>th</sup> and then delivered to the Ronald McDonald House.

A **Kids' Christmas Candy Land Party** was held on Saturday December 13<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 p.m. with the tree lighting at 7:00 p.m. There was also a visit from **Santa**. Afterwards, the **Maltese Center Christmas Cocktail Party** took place. (See pages 22-24.)

A **Bingo** was held in the Lower Hall at 1:30 p.m. on Sunday December 14<sup>th</sup>.

The **New Year's Eve Party** will take place on Wednesday, December 31<sup>st</sup> and is open to people of all ages.



### ONTARIO

#### Greater Toronto Area Lehen Malti

#### LEHEN MALTI (Maltese Voice)

OMNI 1 - Ontario  
Saturdays 8:30 a.m.

Tuesdays 11:30 a.m.  
Thursdays 8:30 a.m.

OMNI BC  
Saturdays 2:00 p.m.

OMNI Alberta  
Saturdays 2:00 p.m.

#### Malta Band Club

A **Christmas Candlelight Concert** was held on Saturday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>. (See page 5.)

The **Children's Christmas Party** took place on Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup>.

The **Annual Christmas Party** was held on Saturday, December 13<sup>th</sup>.

The **New Year's Eve Dinner Dance** will take place on Wednesday, December 31<sup>st</sup>.



The Malta to Memphis Dinner and Show will be held on Saturday, January 31<sup>st</sup>. Tickets \$45 for members and \$50 for non members. Roast beef dinner potatoes and veg, dessert and coffee or tea. Doors open at 6pm, dinner at 7pm. Music for dinner and after show for your dancing pleasure. Call to book Tony at 365 288 2177 Or Virginia 416 873 6013



#### **Maltese-Canadian Museum**

Joanne Saragosa's children's book *it-Torta taż-żokra* (Belly Button Pie) was launched on Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup>. (See pages 17-18.)

#### **Malta Soccer Club, Inc.**

The **Christmas Dinner Dance** was held on Saturday, December 6<sup>th</sup>. (See page 38.)

The **Children's Christmas Party** took place on Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup>.

The **Annual General Meeting** was also held on Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup>.

Another **Bus Trip** to the **Fallsview Casino** in Niagara Falls occurred on Saturday, December 13<sup>th</sup>.

#### **St. Paul the Apostle Parish**

The 9:15 a.m. **Weekday Masses** on Wednesdays and Fridays and the 10:30 a.m. **Sunday Masses** are in **Maltese** and in **English**.

The **Annual Seniors' Christmas Celebration** was held in the Parish Hall on the afternoon of Sunday, December 14<sup>th</sup>.

The **7:30 a.m. Christmas Eve Mass** was celebrated both in English and in Maltese.

The **New Year's Eve Dinner & Dance** for people of all ages will be held on Wednesday, December 31<sup>st</sup>. There will be a **seven-course meal**. Music will be by a **DJ** and the evening will feature **Canadian singer/songwriter Pierina Cincinnato**

The **10:30 a.m. Mass** on Thursday, January 1, 2026 will be in **Maltese**.

#### **London**

The **Christmas Luncheon** took place on Friday, December 5<sup>th</sup> at the **Marconi Club** on Clarke Road. (See page 16.)

The **Swiss Chalet** on Wonderland Road South will be the venue for the Tuesday, January 27, 2026 **Luncheon**.

#### **Windsor**

##### **Malta United Society**

Charlie Bonnici, an outstanding member of the Club and community, passed away on Saturday, December 13<sup>th</sup>. He will be sadly missed.

The **Adult Christmas Party** was held on Saturday, December 20<sup>th</sup>. (See pages 31-37.)

#### **WASHINGTON, DC**

##### **Embassy of Malta**

Participation took place in an International Food Fair. (See page 6.)

The Embassy hosted a visit by the Maltese Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Honourable Angelo Farrugia. (See pages 25-27.)

**CHRISTMAS CANDLELIGHT CONCERT****Malta Band Club**

Here are a few pictures from this year's Christmas Candlelight Concert, held on Saturday, November 22<sup>nd</sup> and featuring the Malta Band. The band will take a well-deserved break and will begin rehearsals again on January 7th, 2026. The band is always looking for new members and we encourage all musicians to reach out if they would like to join a great group of people that enjoy making music together.



Photos courtesy of Ben Bonnici

## ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL FOOD FAIR

### High Commission of Malta in Canada

The High Commission had the opportunity to participate in [Canada's Foreign Policy—Global Affairs Canada](#)'s Annual International Food Fair in support of the Government of Canada Workplace Charitable Campaign. 

We were delighted to showcase the rich flavours of Maltese cuisine and share a selection of traditional Maltese delicacies with the Global Affairs Canada employees here in Ottawa.



We thank Global Affairs Canada for hosting such a vibrant celebration of international culture and [Malta Bake Shop Ltd.](#) for their assistance.

## ANNUAL HOLIDAY MARKET CRAFT SHOW

Lisa Buttigieg-LiGreci

The Maltese American Community Club of Dearborn held its Annual Holiday Market Craft Show on Sunday, November 30<sup>th</sup>. This year we were small, but mighty. I think everyone had a successful day.

Even though we got a lot of snow the night before, we had a steady stream of shoppers



Photo credit, Margaret Muscat Purdy

Thank you to all our volunteers without whom this event and all our events would never happen. Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas season!



(L-R) Suzanne Xuereb, who manned the Club's table; Joe Borg who was behind the bar; Mary Motowski, who took food orders and ran the bake sale; Doris Durkin in the kitchen; Grace-Muscat Harris who organized the event; Margaret Muscat-Purdy who does just about everything; and Neil Durkin in the kitchen. Also, (not pictured) were Tom Muscat, who made the minestrone and Lisa Buttigieg-LiGreci who took all the non-credited photos.



Many of our shoppers enjoyed a nice hot bowl of minestrone and fresh baked pastizzi. Perfect for a very cold and snowy day.

Photo credit, Margaret Muscat Purdy



Lisa Buttigieg-LiGreci was signing copies of *Mom's Maltese Cookbook*, so you too can cook like a Maltese nanna!

Photo credit, Margaret Muscat Purdy...  
but with my phone 😊



Vicki Muscat at her table, Vicki's Knitting selling hats, baby blankets, comforters and various other beautifully hand-crafted items.



**Suzanne Xuereb ran the Club's Maltese Store table.**



**Grace Muscat-Harris at her graceful stained glass table**



**Selling tumblers, books, flags, car stickers, and ornaments. The flags were especially popular.**



**Some examples of her lovely creations**



**Also, a nice variety of T-shirts, hoodies, and aprons**



**She also sells garden stones, jewelry and glassware**



**Rachael and Eric Darin  
at their Petit Patriots table**



**Cute baby onesies with Maltese words  
Translated, they mean  
'my heart' and 'comfort me'**



**Hats, T-shirts and sportswear,  
all with embroidered Maltese crosses.  
I see some new colors this year!**



**Eve Muscat and Rita Dachs at their table  
benefitting the Michigan Parkinson Foundation.**



**Selling vintage jewelry and taking donations.  
100% of their proceeds  
was donated to the Foundation.**



**Hooked on a Flame Wax Melts  
had the entire room smelling heavenly**



**Al the Turner was there  
selling his stunning woodwork items  
with his wife, Pam**



**So many wonderful scents in squeeze bottles**



**They also came in solid bars**



**Such a talented craftsman**





The ornaments were a very popular item  
I got one for myself



Absolutely stunning bowls and vases  
made from oak, hickory, walnut,  
and various other hard woods



## CONGRATULATIONS VALERIE BUHAGIAR

### High Commission of Malta in Canada

The High Commission congratulates acclaimed Maltese Canadian playwright, director, and actress Valerie Buhagiar on the opening of her show *Borma Tbaqbaq - Il-Lingwa Tal-Kċina*, together with Angele Galea, Pauline Fenech and Leah Grech.

This theatrical performance was performed at Aġenzija Ĵgħażagħ, Santa Venera from 28-30 November and 5-7 December 2025. 🎟

Directed by Tyrone Grima, *Borma Tbaqbaq - Il-Lingwa Tal-Kċina* follows the story of Josie, a Maltese Canadian lawyer, who returns to Malta to defend a man accused of murdering a young girl. What begins as a legal case becomes a personal journey as she confronts her own cultural identity.

This show is a powerful example of how the vibrant Maltese Canadian community contributes to art both at home and abroad. We congratulate all of the team in this production! 🎉

This event was held in collaboration with Arts Council Malta, Aġenzija Ĵgħażagħ, and MCAST



## CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PARTY

**Evelyn Simmons**

There were lots of happy faces at the Maltese-American Social Club Children's Christmas Party held on Saturday, December 6<sup>th</sup>!! Click on the link below and enjoy!! Merry Christmas!!!

<http://maltese-americanscsf.org/slideshow.aspx...>



## CHRISTMAS PARTY

**Margaret Muscat Purdy**

The Maltese American Community Club of Dearborn's Christmas party 2025, held on Saturday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, was a very happy sold out crowd!

Our vice president Rita Vella Cruz in charge of ticket sales and organizing always does a phenomenal job. Thank you! Thank you also to Brian Vella, our president, for your support!

We appreciate Paul Borg for his printing of our flyers and tickets and Rob Farr for the beautiful poinsettias on the tables.

A great big thank you first and foremost goes to Joe Formosa who is a one man show cooking up food for 140 people! As always, it was delicious!

Thank you to our kitchen and serving staff starting with Neil Durkin, John Abella, Charles Pace, Tony and Joe Borg. You did a great job!

Thank you Jim Esparza our club DJ. You always are so dedicated to our club!



**Jim Esparza with his assistants**

Rena Xuereb, Nick Suchyta and Louise Weglarz, thank you for your setup and help with the party.

Thank you to John and Eve Muscat (aka Santa and his elf) for three full days of decorating, setup and takedown!



**Santa (John Muscat) and Elf (Eve Muscat)**

Photo courtesy of Eva Muscat

Eve always does a beautiful job decorating the Christmas tree set up on the stage. John hangs all the decorations climbing the ladder! I could not have done this party without John and Eve!



**The Baby Jesus is originally from Malta**

Photo courtesy of Eva Muscat

Thank you to my dad Tom Muscat who helps setup and decorate every year!



**Tom Muscat, in turn, is being decorated**

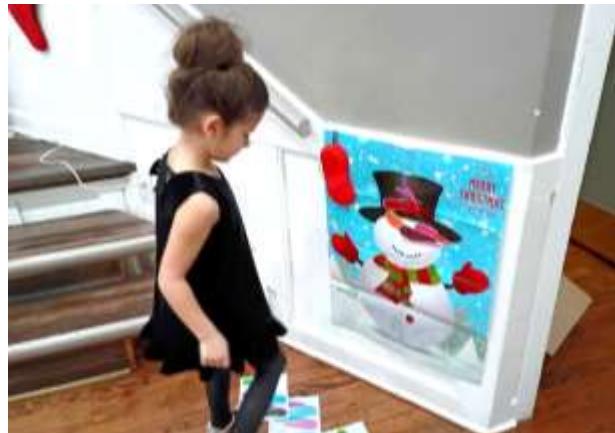
Many of the younger kids got really wrapped up in the party!



There were crafts for the kids...



and games!



They certainly had a lot of fun!





It's always fun to see the kids' excitement when Santa arrives.





A huge shout out to bartenders Holly Ivy and Marissa Vella for keeping our crowd hydrated!



\*\*\*

**Editor's Note:** Eve Muscat (aka Elf) notes that her sister-in-law Margaret Muscat Purdy had organized this successful event.

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## CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON AT THE MARCONI CLUB

**Dan Brock**

Over 65 of us gathered together for a Christmas luncheon at the Marconi Club in London, Ontario, on Friday, December 5<sup>th</sup>. This included some who joined us for the first time.

Following the meal, we got in a few games of bingo before going our separate ways.

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**BOOK LAUNCH OF  
JOANNE SARGOSA'S *IT-TORTA TAŻ-ŻOKRA***

**Dan Brock**

Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup> saw the launching of Joanne Saragosa's *it-Torta taż-Żokra* (Belly Button Pie). This took place between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., at the Maltese-Canadian Museum, 3224 Dundas Street West in Toronto.



On the back cover of this book, published by BDL Publishing of Malta, is a brief overview of the contents of the book which is entirely in Maltese.

*Liema hija dik il-persuna li tammira u tgħożż l-aktar f'hajtek? Għal Gioia hija n-nanna tagħha, li ħadd ma jaf isajjar daqsha. Dan il-ktieb ilaqqagħna mat-tradizzjoni ta' familja u l-mumenti ħelwin li kienu jaqsmu bejniethom Gioia u n-nanna tagħha, waqt li flimkien jippreparaw festa ta' ikel li tiftaħlek l-aptit u thaddimlek is-sensi kollha. Din l-istorja mimilija emozżjoni twassal ir-relazzjoni bejn Gioia u n-nanna sal-ġħatba tad-dar tal-anzjani.*

Here is an English summary of the book:

*Who is the person that you admire and cherish in your life? For Gioia, it's her Nanna, who can cook like no other. A fictional narrative, inspired by true events, Belly Button Pie captures a family tradition and tender moments shared between Gioia and her Nanna as they prepare a feast for the senses. This heartwarming and gentle story follows Gioia and Grandma's relationship into senior care. It is a dedication to grandparents and the elderly who pass on their priceless talents through generations.*

The book's author, Joanne Saragosa, is Canadian-born of Maltese descent, her parents being Godwin and Eileen (Bayliss) Darmanin of the Greater Toronto Area.

Godwin's parents were John and Vincenza (Imbroll) Darmanin who immigrated to Canada with their children in 1967. John died in 1971, while Vincenza lived until August 2023, dying at the age of 106 years, 244 days. (See issue of August 2024, page 16.)

Eileen's parents were John and Dolores (Borg) Bayliss. Eileen immigrated to Canada from Malta in 1966.

I got to chat with Godwin Darmanin when a group connected with St. Paul the Apostle Church, Toronto, the only Maltese parish in the world outside Malta, came to London, Ontario in October 2024. (See the October 2014 issue, pages 15-16.)

Joanne is a graduate of The Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University) and the University of Toronto. She holds a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Early Childhood Education, a Bachelor in Education and a Master of Education. Like her father, Joanne pursued a career in education and was a teacher, literacy consultant, vice principal and principal. She also served as a student achievement officer at the Ministry of Education in Ontario.

Her work with students and colleagues inspired her to write for The Porcupine Collection, a Canadian early reading series published by Curriculum Plus. More recently, Joanne has had work published in The New Canadian Stories Magazine. *It-Torta taż-Żokra*, published by BDL Publishing, is Joanne's first picture book



The book, which bears the stamp of *L-Ägenzija Nazzjonali tal-Litteriżmu*, may be ordered through the following BDL Publishing URL:

<https://bdlbooks.com/author-2/joanne-saragosa/>.

As for the book launch itself, there are some of the photos taken by Joan Carbonaro with the last photo by Kevin George.



**Joanne Saragosa with a “belly button pie” and copies of her book**



**Joanne reading from *it-Torta taż-Żokra***



**MALTESE AMERICAN  
BENEVOLENT SOCIETY'S  
ANNUAL CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PARTY**

**Tanya Caruana**

Thank you to everyone who helped make our Annual Children's Christmas Party a great success on the afternoon of Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup>. We had an ornament craft, games, stuffed animals, popcorn, hot chocolate bar, pizza, cookies and of course presents! We had 19 kids register and 13 attend. Sorry to the six who couldn't make it because of sickness or bad weather.







We also had three baskets raffled: 1) laundry basket winner Fortun Zammit; 2) LEGO basket winner Marla Hool; 3) Christmas Wreath & cds winner Eleno Sammut!

See everyone next year!



**KIDS' CHRISTMAS PARTY AND MEMBERS'  
CHRISTMAS ANNUAL GATHERING**

**Maltese Center, NYC**

Great Events took place at the Maltese Center. The Kids Christmas Party and the Members Christmas Annual Gathering took place in the evening on Saturday, December 13<sup>th</sup>.



And we also thank the members and the Maltese community who help us keep the Maltese Center vibrant.



Great decorations, great atmosphere, great to see all the kids having fun, Santa visit, Mrs. Santa, elves, entertainers, etc.

Thank you once again to all the volunteers of the Maltese Center. From the event coordinators, who transform the Center for all kinds of occasions, the culinary and prep group, who create amazing displays and Maltese traditional cuisine, the amazing Pastizzi crew, the maintenance volunteers, concierge tenders, Committee, contributors and social media personnel.





**SPEAKER OF THE MALTESE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
THE HONOURABLE ANGELO FARRUGIA PAYS A VISIT TO THE USA**

**Embassy of Malta  
to the United States of America**

Ambassador Godfrey Xuereb accompanied the Speaker of the Maltese House of Representatives Honourable Angelo Farrugia during his short visit to the USA. The speaker was the guest of honour at the celebration of Malta's 51st Anniversary of the Republic held in New York.



**Consul General of New York, Denise Dimicoli, in blue blazer  
standing beside the Hon. Angelo Farrugia**

He also participated in the 2025 edition of the Washington Parliamentary Intelligence - Security Forum where he made interventions on three topics on the agenda. On immigration he emphasised Malta's strategy to ensure that the management is firm, fair and humane, protecting the dignity of all persons regardless of their legal status while ensuring that States retain effective control of their borders. His second intervention focused on illicit finance where he stressed that this challenge respects no borders and therefore our responses must be equally transnational, coordinated and resolute. Finally, he informed the Forum that Malta was the first jurisdiction to create a comprehensive legal framework for digital assets and distributed ledger technologies, which evolution has shaped Malta's approach to both technological advancement and financial integrity in the field of blockchain and digital assets.



**Hon. Dr Angelo Farrugia**



During the Forum the Hon Farrugia and Ambassador Xuereb had the opportunity to converse with a number of Parliamentarians from across the globe who were present in Washington DC. 



**Ambassador Godfrey Xuereb and Speaker Angelo Farrugia**



## CELEBRATING THE 51<sup>ST</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF MALTA AS A REPUBLIC IN NEW YORK!



### Consulate General of Malta in New York

From resilience and unity to a dynamic, service-driven economy, Malta's story is one of courage and opportunity.

In honour of this occasion, a reception was co-hosted by the [Consulate General of Malta in New York](#) and the [Permanent Mission of Malta to the United Nations New York](#), supported by [Affarijiet Barranin](#) and [Visit Malta](#), the main sponsor.

The guest of honour, the Hon. Dr [Angelo Farrugia](#), Speaker of the House of Representatives of Malta, delivered an address on the occasion highlighting our nation's resilience and global voice - championing peace, justice and solidarity while honouring the Maltese and Gozitans living abroad who keep Malta's spirit alive across the globe.



**Hon. Dr Angelo Farrugia**



H.E. Dr Godfrey Xuereb, Ambassador of Malta to the United States of America was also in attendance.



**Executive Chef Giovann Attard  
with Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Dr. Angelo Farrugia**

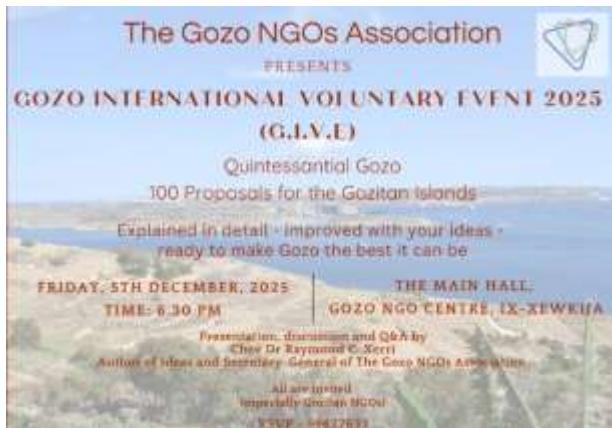
A special thanks to Executive Chef Giovann Attard at AQUA Roma, who crafted Maltese delicacies with a gourmet twist for the event's catering, and to Pauline Grech for baking authentic and divinely tasting *qagħaq tal-ġħasel* for the occasion.

Viva Malta Repubblika 🥂  
**Embassy of Malta to the United States of America  
Malta Tourism Authority** @Michelle\_Buttigieg  
 @Maltese Center In NYC



## GOZO NGO'S ASSOCIATION Vision 2050 Proposals

**Chev Dr Raymond C. Xerri**



**Dr. Raymond C. Xerri presenting a copy of his book, *Gozitan Crossings*, to Malta's President H.E. Miriam Spiteri Debono**



## 100 Proposals for the Gozitan Islands

## I. Our Gozitan Diaspora

- (1) **Gozitan Diaspora & International Office (GD&IO)** is the only 'Welcome Back Home Centre' in the Maltese Islands is a liaison Office to assist return Gozitan migrants to settle in quickly with the least of difficulties: clearing of containers, obtaining official documents, placing children in schools, finding employment, etc. Furthermore, this centre with the assistance of the MFA make contact with the lost or forgotten Gozitans throughout history in different parts of the world. Although this proposal has been realised in the establishment in 2022 by the MGP additional staff is needed and such an Office is recommended to open in the mainland.
- (2) **The Diaspora Museum of Gozitan Islands** is also long overdue and should cover the last two hundred years focusing on Gozo as a migrant nation and its successful diaspora worldwide. This museum is best located at Imġarr Harbour, the point of departure and arrival of all Gozitan diaspora close to the National Migrant's Monument situated along the I-Imġarr waterfront.

The Maltese Islands has nearly twice its population living in 171<sup>2</sup> countries and territories around the world, 790,000<sup>3</sup> in total. Slightly less than half are of Gozitan origin. Only 7%<sup>4</sup> of all our Gozitan diaspora visit Gozo regularly from Australia, France, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and all the rest. 60% of all 12,100 Gozitans living in Gozo today were migrants at one stage or another in their life.

- (3) **Family History Tourism.** About 27,000<sup>5</sup> persons of Gozitan ancestry visit Gozo each year to search their family, research their family genealogy, history and heraldry. A **Genealogy and Heraldry Research Centre** should be established to facilitate such searches and has the potential to attract the 410,000 Gozitan living in 171 countries world-wide. This can be one such tourist niche and can be situated in the place presently serving as the Gozo Courts at the Cittadella, once a new Gozo Law Court is built.
- (4) **'Know your Roots' Tourism** – is an experience for Gozitan youth who want to discover their identity by visiting the Gozitan Islands to have an experience to: (i) obtain their family tree and build their family history, (ii) know where their parents or grandparents came from; (iii) which village(s) they came from; (iv) where they lived, (v) how their lived, (vi) experience the history and way of life of their ancestors, (vii) discover their family heraldry; (viii) experience the village festa, etc. for a week, a fortnight or a month. A full programme is devised with plenty of time to spend and get to know their family and make new friends in Gozo.
- (5) **Diaspora Youth Exchanges for study and work programmes** including working holiday visa schemes agreed with Gozitan diaspora countries like Canada, France, the United States and others. Such a Working Holiday Visa presently exists with Australia.
- (6) **Working Holiday Schemes** should be established with Canada, the USA, the UK and other diaspora countries to allow youths from 16 to 31 years of age to work and study in Gozo and in the same time get to know their extended and ancestral family, way of life, culture and history.

<sup>1</sup> Gozo NGO's Association has adopted this researched and authored paper by Chev. Dr Raymond C. XERRI, K.H.S, Ph.D.(Australia), M.A.(Dip.St.)(Malta), D.D.S., E.U.Sch.(E.U.Law)(F.R.G.), B.A.(Hons.)(U.S.A.), **Quinessential Gozo**, published in October 2024 by the same author who is the present Secretary-General of the same association. This document was accepted by the Committee of the Gozo NGOs Association at the Meeting held on Wednesday, 9th July 2025 and minor amendments and updates.

<sup>2</sup> Pg. 9, *The Gozitan Diaspora, Perspettivi* - A Gozo Review, Issue 5, October 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Pg.10, Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Malta Tourism Authority, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

(7) There are over 700 homes of Gozitan return migrants from around the world built in a particular style and architecture which homes bear the names, country coat-of-arms and symbols as tribute to the countries where the resident families returned from. A number of selected homes should be preserved by being placed on the **scheduled list of protected buildings** since unfortunately many are being torn down to be replaced by small-sized flats. This proposal is addressed to the GRDA document concerning context-sensitive design.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> 'Discussion Paper -Nurturing Gozo's Urban Character through Cross-Sensitive Design,' February 1974



**MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER ROBERT ABELA TO THE MALTESE COMMUNITIES LIVING ABROAD**

**Embassy of Malta  
to the United States of America**



Dear Maltese citizens,

As we come together to celebrate the joy of this Christmas season, I extend my warmest and most heartfelt greetings to you all, both as individuals and as Maltese communities living across the world. This time of year, embodies unity and reflects the values that shape our identity. Though many miles may separate us, the spirit of Christmas draws us closer, reminding us of the profound ties that bind us as one Maltese family scattered across the globe.

We look back on this past year as one in which we continued to drive forward meaningful reforms and strengthen our nation for the benefit of our people. Malta has remained at the forefront in advocating for peace through our various contributions within the international community. Our efforts extended well beyond our six-month Presidency of the Council of Europe, reaching other shores where we championed dialogue as the true path to peace, particularly within our Mediterranean region, but also far beyond it.

Our commitment to global peace will remain steadfast. I am confident that Malta's voice will continue to be heard on vital issues: from promoting peace and mediation to strengthening diplomatic ties across continents. The identity of our nation is built on resilience, respect, and compassion, values that endure wherever Maltese people call home.

We take great pride in being Maltese, a pride that extends far beyond our shores. I am deeply moved by every citizen who continues to honour our traditions while living abroad.

To all Maltese communities living overseas, we express our sincere gratitude. Your dedication ensures that the Maltese identity continues to thrive. You serve as a bridge between generations and between nations, strengthening our diaspora and reaffirming the enduring bonds that define who we are.

Christmas is a time to reflect on these bonds. To reconnect with family and friends and to celebrate the values that unite us: love, respect, and solidarity. I wish each and every one of you a blessed Christmas and a New Year filled with prosperity, good health, and peace.

**MEETING WITH AMERICAN SECRETARIES OF TREASURY AND ENERGY****Embassy of Malta  
to the United States of America**

Ambassador Godfrey Xuereb joined other EU HoM based in Washington DC for a meeting with Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent and with Secretary of Energy Chris Wright. During both meetings, the US vision on Finance and Energy were discussed with a particular focus on EU-US relations in both sectors.



## OUR CHRISTMAS PARTY

### Malta United Society of Windsor, Ontario

*I-Milled it-Tajjeb* from all of us here at the Malta United Society of Windsor

It was a pleasure to share our annual Christmas social with you at the Club on Saturday, December 20<sup>th</sup>.

We had a beautiful evening to close out 2025.

Heartfelt greetings, be safe and enjoy your time with family















I would like to say what an amazing evening we had at the Club. A big shout out to all who made the evening special. You all know who you are and I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart. To all who attended, thank you for attending and I hope you truly enjoyed yourself.

On behalf of the Malta United Society of Windsor I and the entire executive committee would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. May your time spent with friends and family be joyful and prosperous.



## CHRISTMAS DINNER DANCE

**Mary Ann Piscopo**

The Melita Soccer Club's Christmas dinner dance was held at our facilities on Dundas Street in Toronto on Saturday, December 6<sup>th</sup>.

Everyone who came out enjoyed the night. There was a delicious meal, music and friends.

Merry Christmas to all.



## THE PASSING OF MARK CARUANA

**John Aquilina**

I am so saddened to have stumbled across a notice of Mark's passing away. He was a cherished friend, a person whom I highly respected, and whose wise counsel I sought often on a wide number of matters.

Mark was one of the humblest persons one would ever meet. Yet his quiet and unassuming demeanour belied a great intellect that stored a powerhouse of knowledge, particularly about Maltese migration to Australia.

His access to sources on Maltese migration, both in Malta and in Australia, has unearthed tonnes of historical data about Maltese families, their family histories, migration patterns, ship voyages, and Maltese settlement in Australia.

In Mark's passing the Maltese Australian community has lost one of its major cornerstones, and an outstanding advocate of the incredible Maltese contribution to Australian history, and the Australian way of life.

Mark was indeed a unique person, and no one will ever be able to replace him, or the broad extent and wealth of his knowledge about Maltese migration to Australia.

Heartfelt condolences to Antoinette, Mark's family and his many friends in Australia, Malta, the United States, and beyond. May he rest in peace.



Reprinted with the permission of H.E. John J. Aquilina, Ambassador of Malta to Brazil

## MARK CARUANA (1946–2025)

Barry York

Multiculturalism, ethno-historical studies, migrant welfare, and the Maltese community in Australia have lost a significant champion with the passing of Mark Caruana, who died in Sydney on 24 November 2025, at the age of 79.



Mark was born in Sliema, Malta, in 1946. A strong student, he completed A-levels in Chemistry and Italian and initially worked as a control analyst in a synthetic nylon factory. He later joined the University of Malta, working in the library and gaining a library assistant certificate, before transferring to the Chemistry Department as a laboratory technician. He was still employed there at the time of his emigration in 1973.

In 1970 he married Antoinette (née Micallef).



Their son Adrian was born in Malta in 1973. Mark migrated to Australia later that year, travelling alone by plane and paying his own passage. Six weeks later he sent for Antoinette and Adrian, and the family settled in Marayong, New South Wales.

In Sydney, Mark built a long career in community and public service. Over the years he worked as a library assistant, migrant welfare worker, district officer, children's protection worker with Community Services, schools community liaison officer, community information officer, and multicultural liaison officer.

He was also a tireless community volunteer. Mark was a co-founder and past president of the La Valette Social Centre in Blacktown and Vice-President of the Maltese Community Council of NSW. He served on committees of the Blacktown Migrant Resource Centre, Maltese Welfare NSW, the Maltese Cultural Association, and the Mt Druitt Ethnic Community Centre, and was a co-founder of the Salesian Past Pupils and past president of the Don Bosco Association.

Mark loved the people and diversity of Sydney's western suburbs and served as a board member of the Western Sydney Regional Advisory Committee in the 1990s. Suburbs such as Blacktown, Marayong, Pendle Hill and Greystanes were once known as 'Little Malta' because of the significant Maltese settlement there, which began with market gardeners in the 1920s and 1930s.

With his background in librarianship, he helped establish the Blacktown Library Ethnic Advisory Committee in 1977 and remained on its board for 20 years. For his long-standing commitment to the Maltese community of NSW, Mark Caruana was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2020.



**Mark & Antoinette Caruana after his being Awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia, September 9, 2020**

A devout Catholic, Mark remained active in retirement in the social justice group of his local church, St Andrew the Apostle in Marayong, assisting refugees and new arrivals—work he had undertaken since settling there in the 1970s.

In the mid-1990s, he compiled community profiles on newly arrived groups—including Afghans, Samoans, Tongans and Filipinos—for the metropolitan western region of the Education Department, to assist school staff working with these communities.

Through his welfare and community work in the 1970s and 1980s, Mark met elderly Maltese migrants who had settled in Australia before the mass immigration that followed the Second World War. Recognising a major gap in Australian history, he set about preserving their stories through recorded oral history interviews. He particularly valued the lives of early working-class settlers—labourers, factory workers, carpenters, waterside workers, market gardeners and cane cutters. He described this work as “a rescue operation” and became a pioneer in migrant oral history.

As a frequent contributor to *The Maltese Herald*, Mark shared his research findings and reported on community life. Beyond collecting interviews, he was a true scholar, keen to analyse, discuss and understand what the recordings revealed.

Over time, he recorded more than 200 oral history interviews with Maltese migrants, including some who had arrived in Australia as early as the 1910s and 1920s.

Alongside his scholarship was his personal character: patient, polite, considerate, reliable, selfless, and unfailingly generous.

Mark’s archival work was hands-on and deeply committed. During a visit to Malta in 1994, he spent long hours in the National Archives in Rabat gathering historical records and returned to Australia with a suitcase full of passports.

For years afterwards, he worked quietly at home, entering data, cross-checking names, and building databases that later became invaluable research resources. This slow, largely unseen labour was driven by his conviction that these histories deserved careful preservation.

From Australia, Mark processed more than 100,000 passport applications dating from 1815 to 1940, making them accessible online. Characteristically, he sought no recognition; the practical usefulness of the work was its own reward. Even so, it is fitting that our names appear together on our co-authored publications *Oral History: A Practical Guide* (1996) and *Emmanuel Attard: From Gozo to Gallipoli and Australia* (1994).

In 2007, the National Library of Australia invited Mark to be interviewed for its Oral History collection. True to his modest nature, he was initially reluctant but eventually agreed. As someone who dedicated his life in Australia to recording the stories of others, it is entirely appropriate that his own story, in his own words, is now preserved within the nation’s pre-eminent oral history collection.

Mark is survived by his wife Antoinette Caruana, their children Adrian, Christine and Marise, and six grandchildren.

**Editor’s note:** Dr. Barry York, of Canberra, Australia, was able to prepare this tribute to Mark Caruana with the assistance and approval of the Caruana family.



### READERS’ COMMENTS AFTER RECEIVING THE NOVEMBER ISSUE OF THE NEWSLETTER

Extremely good work from your end. Btw Kantera and Etnika are very popular over here and it was fantastic to note that you could all experience their talents.

On page 31 I spotted a sweet couple, friends of ours - Joe and Frances Tanti. Should you happen to come across them give them our best regards.

Mary Dimech Deguara, Malta

The year is going so quickly already. It is good to sit and read this newsletter and the same for the next one that is coming....Thank you for all you do and produce.

Marian Atkinson, Queensland, Australia

Thanks for the newsletters. I read that Mr Mark Caruana has passed away. Can you send me information so that I will prepare an article for the *Leħen* about this personality?....If I have enough material (information + photos) I will ask the editor if she agrees if I prepare this article.

Joe Camilleri, Malta

**Editor’s note:** *Il-Leħen* (previously known as *Leħen is-Sewwa*) was first published September 1, 1928. It is a newspaper based on Catholic views that is published every Sunday by the Malta Catholic Action.

Thanks for your usual commitment in the e-newsletter and for the tribute paid to Mr Mark Caruana’s passing. It is a true loss for Malta’s diasporic studies.

Stephanie Schembri, Archives Officer,  
National Archives of Malta

Thank you very much for all your hard work compiling these very informative and creative newsletters. It's nice to know what's happening in the Maltese community outside Malta. I often wonder what people think of Malta these days. I visited Malta and Gozo in August 2024 and was able to confirm my Maltese citizenship. I'm hoping to get a passport as well. I need to retire soon so I can spend more time visiting Malta and Europe while I still have the desire to travel overseas.

Tony Zammit, Ontario

Thank you for the November Edition and thank you especially for your tribute to Mark Caruana.

John J. Aquilina,  
Ambassador of Malta to Brazil



Thanks for keeping up with the preparation and issue of the newsletter for the month of November 2025.

Your reporting with events happening in the United States, Canada, Australia and Malta and elsewhere, is keeping you young at heart. At the same time, all the readers of your newsletter, feel happy and proud to stay on your mailing list and eagerly awaiting all that you prepare for us.

I very much appreciated the writeups you showed about departed friends George Debono [page 9] and Mark Caruana [page 45]. True, they leave a void. At the same time, they shall be remembered for all they have done during their lives. Thanks to your detailed reporting from episodes in their individual life, we came to know much about their achievements in life.

Not lacking of course, I admired the many photos of Maltese ladies who continue to show their cooking talents. Far away from their home land and with many years of experience, they share the best baking capabilities with their specialities for the Festive Season as shown.

Once again, I am thanking you Dan, for a wonderful job that you are doing, by maintaining a good communication of all fellow Maltese persons, living in Malta and around the world. Keep up the good work dear friend.

George Stagno Navarra, Malta

Dan.... Bless your heart...

I opened your newsletter just now and saw that you had included a full page on Mom's life...and passing...I passed it on to my sisters, Brenda and Judy.

Your story portrayed a great deal of respect for Mother and included historic background on her family...You blended and titled the piece beautifully. Thank you.

I am not certain if it is possible to make corrections at this stage...but share with you, that in the second column...Dad, whom you introduced as George Porter in the first column was referred to as JOHN, in the second column...a few times. AND Jane's last child is Judy.

If I can be of any help making these corrections, please let me know.

*Mabel F. Higgins, Ontario*

**Editor's note:** The correction and addition refer to page 44.

Once again, I enjoyed the November newsletter, better late than never. I can't imagine how busy you get but let it be known we appreciate all your hard work Thank you again for being there for us.

Rena Xuereb, Michigan

Thank you so much for the "November Newsletter". As usual, I enjoyed reading **most** of the articles, and I also forwarded to most of my friends.

Take care, and keep up the good work!  
Carmen Galea, Ontario



Thank you for your patience and time in preparing the e-Newsletter.

It's quite unique to North America.  
Mani Mifsud, Ontario

I just want to say that I really enjoy the Newsletter and agree there doesn't need to be a timeline...I just enjoy all the articles! You are doing a great job!!! And you are appreciated!

Yvonne Zammit Mitchell, Ontario

Keep up your good work  
Hope you have a great year.

Dr. Michael Falzon,  
Minister for Social Policy and Children's Rights, Malta

## MALTESE ORGANIZATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA

### **Festa San Gejtanu Association**

c/o 5745 Coopers Avenue, Mississauga, ON  
L4Z 1R9  
647-232-8845

### **Festa San Gorg Association of Toronto**

c/o 36 Sequoia Road, Vaughan, ON L4H 1W6  
905-216-8432/416-277-2291

### **Gozo Club Toronto**

c/o 1205 Royal York Road, Toronto, ON M9A 4B5  
416-231-9710  
[gozoclub@gmail.com](mailto:gozoclub@gmail.com)

### **Inanna on Stage**

[www.joannedancer.com](http://www.joannedancer.com)  
c/o 356 Pacific Avenue, Toronto, ON M6P 2R1  
416-707-2355  
[desertdancer007@yahoo.ca](mailto:desertdancer007@yahoo.ca)

### **Knights of Columbus - Canada – Council # 12782**

c/o St Patrick's Church, 921 Flagship Drive,  
Mississauga, ON, L4Y 2J6  
905-270-2301 (Church)  
[stpatricksmi@archtoronto.org](mailto:stpatricksmi@archtoronto.org)

Grand Knight Amadeo Cuschieri

### **Legion of Mary – “Our Lady of the Migrant”**

c/o St. Paul The Apostle Parish  
3224 Dundas St. W., Toronto M6P 2A3  
Tel: 416-767-7054  
[www.saint-paul-Maltese.com](http://www.saint-paul-Maltese.com)  
[stpaulmssp@gmail.com](mailto:stpaulmssp@gmail.com)  
President: Mary Vella

### **Lehen Malti**

<https://www.omnity.ca> > shows > lehen-malti  
c/o 2387 Chilsworthy Avenue., Mississauga, ON  
L5B 2R4  
Contact Person: Joe Sherri  
416-571-3944  
email: [lehenmalti@hotmail.com](mailto:lehenmalti@hotmail.com)

### **Malta Band Club Mississauga**

5745 Coopers Ave., Mississauga, ON L4Z 1K9  
905-890-850  
[www.maltabandclub.com](http://www.maltabandclub.com)  
[maltabandclub@bellnet.ca](mailto:maltabandclub@bellnet.ca)

### **Malta United Society of Windsor, Ontario**

2520 Seminole St., Windsor, ON N8Y1X4  
519-974-6719  
[maltaunitedsociety.windsor@gmail.com](mailto:maltaunitedsociety.windsor@gmail.com)  
Opening hours: Saturday 6:00 p.m.-12:00 a.m.  
(Except holidays)

### **Malta Village Association (Est. 1995)**

c/o 3256 Dundas Street West, Toronto M6P 2A3  
Tel: 416-769-2174  
Fax: 416-769-2174  
[maltabakeshopltd@gmail.com](mailto:maltabakeshopltd@gmail.com)  
att: Antonia Buttigieg

### **Maltese American Benevolent Society, Inc.**

1832 Michigan Ave. Detroit, MI 48216  
313-961-8393  
<http://detroitmaltese.com>  
Opening hours:  
Friday 5:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.  
Sunday 12:00 p.m. -9:00 p.m.

### **Maltese American Community Club of Dearborn**

5221 Oakman Blvd, Dearborn, MI 48126  
313-846-7077  
[info@malteseamericanclub.org](mailto:info@malteseamericanclub.org)  
Opening hours: Monday, Wednesday & Saturday  
10:00 am. – 1:00 p.m.  
Dinners served: Friday evenings 6:00 p.m. – 10:00  
p.m.  
Before and after 7:00 p.m. first  
Friday Mass

### **Maltese-American Social Club of San Francisco**

924 El Camino Real, South San Francisco, CA  
94080  
650-871-4611  
[contact-us@Maltese-AmericanSCSF.org](mailto:contact-us@Maltese-AmericanSCSF.org)  
Opening hours: Tuesday 5:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.  
(every 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of the month only)  
Thursday 5:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.  
Friday 5:00 p.m.– 1:00 a.m.  
Sunday 9:00 am.- 5:00 p.m.

### **Maltese Canadian Association of the City of Hamilton (MCACH)**

c/o 381 Fairview Drive, Brantford ON N3R 2X7  
[mcach1964@gmail.com](mailto:mcach1964@gmail.com)

### **Maltese Canadian Association (Gozo)**

c/o Trillium, Sqaq Nru 1, Triq it-Tigrija, ix-Xagħra  
Tel: 011 356 21560656  
[mcagozo@hotmail.com](mailto:mcagozo@hotmail.com)

### **Maltese-Canadian Cruisers**

c/o 5745 Coopers Avenue, Mississauga, ON  
L4Z 1R9  
416-524-2573  
att: Gianni Borg

### **Maltese Canadian Cultural Association, The**

c/o Carl Azzopardi  
[info@themcca.ca](mailto:info@themcca.ca)

**Maltese-Canadian Museum**

St. Paul the Apostle Church Complex  
3224 Dundas St. W., Toronto, ON M6P 2A3  
416-767-7054

**Maltese Canucks**

c/o 3336 Dundas Street West, Toronto, ON, M6P 2A4  
416-909-7357/414-670-2662  
[carl@isgtransport.com](mailto:carl@isgtransport.com)/[b\\_azzo18@yahoo.com](mailto:b_azzo18@yahoo.com)

**Maltese Center, NYC**

27-20 Hoyt Ave. S. Astoria, NY 11102  
718-728-9893

[info@themaltesecenter.com](mailto:info@themaltesecenter.com)

Opening hours:

Friday 5:00 p.m. – 11:00 p.m.  
Sunday 8:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.

**Maltese Cross Foundation of California**

PO Box 698, San Carlos, CA 94070

**Maltese Culture Club of Durham**

c/o 124 Ribblesdale Drive, Whitby, ON L1N 7C8  
289-939-8377  
[mmmpastizzi@gmail.com](mailto:mmmpastizzi@gmail.com)

**Maltese Heritage Association San Francisco Bay Area**

Post Office Box 422, Millbrae, CA 94030  
650-303-1256  
[www.mhasfbayarea.org](http://www.mhasfbayarea.org)

**Maltese Heritage Program (Toronto)**

c/o 59A Terry Drive, Toronto, ON, M6N 4Y5  
Coordinator: Carmen Galea  
416-766-5830  
[carmengalea4949@gmail.com](mailto:carmengalea4949@gmail.com)

**Maltese Historical Society (San Francisco)**

c/o [leprofess@aol.com](mailto:leprofess@aol.com)

**Melita Soccer Club Inc.**

3336 Dundas St. W., Toronto, ON M6P 2A4  
416-763-5317  
[clubmelita@gmail.com](mailto:clubmelita@gmail.com)

**St. Paul the Apostle Parish**

3224 Dundas St. W. Toronto, ON M6P 2A3  
416-767-7054  
[www.saint-paul-maltese.com](http://www.saint-paul-maltese.com)  
[stpaulmssp@gmail.com](mailto:stpaulmssp@gmail.com)

**St. Paul the Apostle Parish Mission Group**

c/o 281 Gilmour Ave., Toronto, ON M6P 3B6  
416-708-8627  
[www.facebook.com/john.vella.1044186](http://www.facebook.com/john.vella.1044186)  
[giovanel@sympatico.ca](mailto:giovanel@sympatico.ca)

**St. Paul the Apostle Youth Group (Toronto)**

3224 Dundas Street West, Toronto, ON M6P 2A3  
647-524-1115  
[jason.borg@hotmail.ca](mailto:jason.borg@hotmail.ca)/[sborg@rogers.com](mailto:sborg@rogers.com)

**St. Paul's Maltese Choir**

c/o St Paul the Apostle Parish  
3224 Dundas St. W., Toronto M6P 2A3  
416-767-7054  
[www.saint-paul-maltese.com](http://www.saint-paul-maltese.com)  
[stpaulmssp@gmail.com](mailto:stpaulmssp@gmail.com)  
President: Lino Debono

**SOME MALTESE DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS IN NORTH AMERICA****Embassy of Malta to the United States of America**

2017 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20008  
Phone: 202-462-3611  
Fax: 202-387-5470  
[maltaembassy.washington@gov.mt](mailto:maltaembassy.washington@gov.mt)

**Consulate General of Malta in New York**

244 st 48th Street, Level 1,  
New York City, NY 10017  
646-274-6896  
646-274-6897  
General inquiries: [consul.newyork@gov.mt](mailto:consul.newyork@gov.mt)  
Official correspondence:  
[maltaconsulate.newyork@gov.mt](mailto:maltaconsulate.newyork@gov.mt)

**High Commission of Malta in Canada**

275 Slater Street, Suite 401, Ottawa, ON  
 [maltahighcommission.ottawa@gov.mt](mailto:maltahighcommission.ottawa@gov.mt)

 [missions.foreign.gov.mt/high-commissions/Canada](http://missions.foreign.gov.mt/high-commissions/Canada)

**Consulate General of Malta in Toronto**

Sun Life Financial Centre  
3300 Bloor Street West Suite 3060  
10th Floor – CentreTower  
Etobicoke M8X 2X3  
Toronto, ON  
Phone: 416-207-0922 416-207-0989  
Fax: 416-207-0986  
[maltaconsulate.toronto@gov.mt](mailto:maltaconsulate.toronto@gov.mt)

## FEATURE

# The story behind an Infant Jesus wax image



DAN BROCK

Among the many items in the Maltese-Canadian Museum at the St Paul the Apostle church complex in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, is a waxen image of the Infant Jesus in a cloth dress. I had given it to the museum a few years ago, via Fr Manuel Parnis, MSSP, pastor of St Paul's (2015-19). The simple waxen image is nondescript but the story behind it is both fascinating and centred around Christmas.

Back in the latter part of 1935, Fr Dovik (Fr Ludovik Darmanin), a priest at Jesus of Nazareth (In-Nazzarenu) parish in Sliema, had asked one of his parishioners, George Gatt, if his eight-year-old son, Francis, would be willing to deliver the traditional Christmas midnight mass sermon – il-priedka tat-tifel (the boy's sermon) or il-priedka tal-Mifflid (the Christmas sermon). George asked the boy and young Francis agreed.

Fr Dovik then loaned George a traditional, handwritten boy's sermon. Francis's sister, Nan, some 14 years older than him, transcribed it into a school exercise book and then helped her little brother to learn the sermon by heart.

What is interesting about the copy used by Francis's sister to make her transcription is that it was already well-worn and many years, if not decades, old.

Moreover, it was written in an Italianised form of Maltese that has long been discontinued. Thus, "c" or "ch" is used for "k", so "kreatur" appears as "creatatur" and "kien" as "chien".

There is a difference in spelling to that used in Maltese today: "hekk" is written as "ek" and "qnl" as "kal", to cite but two examples. Nor does the original text use the diacritic marks we are now accustomed to in modern Maltese.

Nan patiently coached her little brother until he had both committed the sermon to memory and had mastered the

gestures needed in its delivery. As it turned out, on the night in question, Francis's father was even more nervous than he was. George Gatt asked the priest if he might sit up in the choir loft so that people wouldn't be looking at him should Francis make mistakes in the preaching of his sermon.

Young Francis did such a fine job at the Christmas midnight mass that, two years later, Fr Dovik asked the young boy to give the same sermon at the Christmas midnight mass at St Leonard church in Kirkop where his colleague, Fr Joseph Inguañez, was pastor. Francis, now 10 years old, agreed. As a token of appreciation for the delivery of his memorised sermon, Fr Inguañez gave young Francis a wax image of the Infant Jesus. Later, Francis's mother, the former Carmela Micallef, made a gown for it.

As for young Francis, he spent the night at the parish rectory and, later that morning on Christmas Day, made the rounds with Fr Inguañez to the homes of some of the parishioners. Of course, there was no way in which the priest or young Francis could escape accepting an alcoholic drink at each of the homes visited. Francis "Frank" Gatt recalled being tipsy by the time they had left the second home.

After Francis returned home from Kirkop, his father folded the exercise book in which the sermon had been written and put it away alongside other important family papers. It was by good fortune that this copy of



Francis Gatt holding the church's Baby Jesus statue after the Christmas midnight mass at Jesus of Nazareth parish church, Sliema, in 1935.

the sermon was kept and survived World War II, considering the family had moved four times between 1935 and 1948.

By the spring of 1948, Francis the boy had grown into manhood. It was in this year that he and his older brother, Tony made up their minds to emigrate to Canada. Tony was married and had a son. Francis had been engaged for about two years to Rita Yvonne Grixti, also a native of Sliema.

When Francis informed Yvonne and her parents of his decision to seek a better future in Canada, they were agreeable. It was also decided that Yvonne would have an easier time coming to Canada if she were Francis's wife rather than his fiancée. Consequently, they were married on May 8, 1948, at Stella Maris parish church in Sliema.

Coincidentally, the pastor who officiated at the wedding was none other than Fr Inguañez, formerly of St Leonard church in Kirkop.

Some days after Frank and Yvonne's marriage, Fr Inguañez had occasion to visit the home of Yvonne's parents, John and Catherine (née Miller) Grixti. On the dresser in one of the



The wax image of the Infant Jesus, one of the hundreds of donated items in the possession of the Maltese-Canadian Museum, Toronto, Canada.

bedrooms, he noticed a small wax statue of the Infant Jesus sitting on a papier-mâché rock with his hands outspread.

The rock and statue were enclosed in a glass dome with a wooden base. Wondering how this gift had ended up in the Grixti home, the amazed priest remarked: "I gave it to a boy." To which Catherine Grixti replied: "That boy is my daughter's husband!"

When Francis went to Canada in June 1948, he brought the exercise book with the sermon his sister Nan had written out for him in 1935. It was probably Yvonne who brought the wax image of the Infant Jesus when she joined her husband in September 1948.

Both the exercise book and wax image managed to survive several subsequent moves in London, Ontario. In 2013, I was privileged to photocopy the book and photograph the Infant Jesus. After copying out the sermon and having it fact-checked for accuracy, I was able to have individuals translate it into modern Maltese and then into English.

When the late Albert Vella, then the interviewer for Lehen Malti in Toronto, contacted a friend of his at Jesus of Nazareth parish church in Sliema on my behalf as to whether the original or other boys' sermons were in the possession of the church archives, Albert received the following reply: "I was archivist here in Sliema for some time. I do not remember ever coming across old Christmas sermons. I have asked but nobody seems to know anything about them."

Could it be that the text of the sermon, written in an Italianised form of Maltese and possibly dating as far back as 1900, is the oldest surviving copy of such a boy's midnight mass sermon in existence?

As for the waxen image of the Infant Jesus, Frank Gatt generously gave it to me a short while before his death in February 2017. Believing this waxen image, with the story behind it, was too important to be hidden away in private hands, I donated it, shortly after Frank's death, and through Fr Parnis, to the Maltese-Canadian Museum in Toronto.

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*The oldest surviving copy of such a boy's midnight mass sermon in existence?*

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