



SOVRANO MILITARE ORDINE OSPEDALIERO  
DI SAN GIOVANNI DI GERUSALEMME DI RODI E DI MALTA

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UFFICIO COMUNICAZIONI

## Press Release

### 900 years since the official recognition by Pope Paschal II

*Rome 8 February* - February 2013 marks an important anniversary for the Sovereign Order of Malta. Exactly 900 years ago Pope Paschal II promulgated the *Solemn Privilege* that officially recognised the community of the Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem and placed it under the protection of the Apostolic See with the right to elect freely its heads. It is thanks to this document, conserved in the national archives of Malta, that the Sovereign Order of Malta has been a lay-religious order for over 900 years.

Throughout 2013, the Sovereign Order of Malta's institutions in the five continents will celebrate this special anniversary with a series of initiatives. **The most significant commemoration will take place on 9 February 2013 in Rome: in Saint Peter's Basilica Pope Benedict XVI will address 4,500 members and volunteers arriving from all over the world**, after the celebration of the Holy Mass by Cardinal Secretary of State, Tarciso Bertone. Authorities of the Italian Government, of the Holy See, the European Union, including 10 cardinals, and over 170 diplomatic representatives will participate.

The *Solemn Privilege*, identified with the opening words of its text, *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis*, sets the legal basis for the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, known today as the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta. The Order was founded in the Holy Land over half a century earlier as a monastic community looking after poor pilgrims in a hospital in Jerusalem. Thanks to this document, the Hospitallers of St. John became a lay religious order. This document has a great institutional significance: with this Bull the Pope established that the Order had the absolute right to ensure the continuation of its work by electing, in due time, a successor to the Order's founder, brother Gerard, with the right to freely elect its heads, without interference from other lay or religious authorities.

As far as its historical significance is concerned, this Bull gives posterity an idea of the role and importance of Blessed Gerard, of his personal sanctity and that of the group of professed religious people who worked with him. It also highlights the importance of the services provided to pilgrims and the poor in Jerusalem. A list of hospitals and hospices in France and Italy compiled some decades after the foundation of the Order illustrates how the institution established by brother Gerard was not limited to the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem but had already branched out into Europe.

As the Order of Malta's 79<sup>th</sup> Grand Master Fra' Matthew Festing explains: "Celebrating the 900 years of the promulgation of *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis* is not only a reverential acknowledgement of our past but is also a prospect for the future. I am certain that this solemn commemoration will strengthen not only the sense of belonging to our Order of all of the Order's members and volunteers scattered throughout the world, but also the quality and intensity of the service performed today under its banner

in 120 countries. It is a service as necessary today as it was a thousand years ago, to alleviate physical and spiritual frailties, to promote peace and justice and to satisfy the perpetual need to help our fellow men.”

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The Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta, founded in Jerusalem around the year 1050, is a sovereign subject of international law and a Catholic lay religious order. The mission of the Order, summarised in the motto *Tuitio Fidei et Obsequium Pauperum*, is to witness the faith and serve the poor and the sick.

The Order of Malta has its own institutions in the five continents for a total of 13,500 members, 80,000 volunteers, supported by more than 25,000 doctors, nurses and auxiliary nurses. The Order of Malta runs hospitals, medical and social centres, nursing homes for the elderly and the disabled, centres for terminally ill patients, volunteers corps in more than 120 countries. The Order of Malta is on the frontline whenever natural disasters occur and armed conflicts take place. In recent years, the most significant interventions of the Order have taken place in Kosovo and Macedonia, India, South East Asia (after the tsunami), Afghanistan, Pakistan, Mexico, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Georgia, and Haiti.

The Sovereign Order of Malta has bilateral diplomatic relations with more than 100 States and with the European Commission, with which it exchanges ambassadors. It has permanent observer missions at the United Nations (New York, Geneva, Paris, Vienna, Rome, Nairobi, Bangkok) and its specialised agencies, and representatives in major other international organisations. The Order is neutral, impartial and non-political and does not pursue any economic or political goal. It does not depend on any other state or government.

At the head of the Order is the 79th Grand Master Fra' Matthew Festing, assisted by members of the Sovereign Council. Since 1834 the seat of the government of the Order of Malta is in Rome, where it has extraterritorial rights.

For more info: [www.orderofmalta.int](http://www.orderofmalta.int)

