

Presentation RC La Valette

Pat Salomone

- 1) Allow me to begin where everything started , that is about a year before the charter day of our club, RC La Valette Malta, which took place in April 2002.

Before that date there existed an honourable Rotary Club, The Rotary Club Malta, formed in the late 1960s by a group of Maltese gentlemen. By the end of the 20th century some members in that club advocated the entry of ladies in their midst, but there was some controversy. It was therefore decided to promote a mixed gender club. So, we came into existence and, before charter day, we the founder members, decided ours was to be a 'fun' club and was to adopt the name of the founder of our capital city which is well known worldwide – 'Valette'. We knew everyone would remember that name. Our club banner shows the skyline of Valletta, protected by UNESCO and sometimes challenged by modern development.

- 2) Here we see the group photo of founder members on our charter day. Perhaps because we were the first mixed gender club in District 2110, we had the honour of being chartered by none other but the International President Richard D King, here seated in the middle, front row, next to District Gov Timineri. The International President's presence made this a a very special event which saw many Rotarians from Sicily come over.
- 3) As an active member of my club I have always looked for possible occasions of collaboration with entities concerning Valletta and Grand Master Valette. My voluntary work with Din l-Art Helwa, Malta's major Heritage NGO, particularly with regards to the restoration of Valletta's first and oldest building, presented the best opportunity.

This image shows the recently restored façade of our Lady of Victory Church, Valletta's oldest building. This is a Baroque addition to the original smaller church built by La Valette while all around his city was being erected on the peninsula, known as Mount Sciberras, by Maltese stonemasons under architect Francesco Laparelli da Cortona and his Maltese assistant Girolamo Cassar.

- 4) In September 1565, when the defeated Ottoman fleet sailed away from Malta, Grand Master Jean Parisot de Valette had a Mass of thanksgiving said out in the open. Mount Sciberras was bare, except for the destroyed Fort St

Elmo at the very tip. GM Valette had a Church dedicated to Our lady of Victory built on this spot, the rest of the city was then very much a 'work in progress'.

La Valette was to pass away two years later and was buried in the crypt of this, his church.

We now see the church under which lies the foundation stone of Valletta, dated 1567. Opposite stands the statue representing GM Valette. In his right hand the Grandmaster holds the plan of his city, 'Città umilissima' while in his left he holds his heroic sword.

Nearly 500 years have passed since the Great Siege and the building of Our Lady of Victory Church, yet these events have moulded the '*forma mentis*' of us Maltese in many ways. The historic heritage, especially the built heritage, remains in our DNA. So how could a Rotary Club called Rotary la Valette Malta not acknowledge this?

- 5) Here are some members of Rotary Club la Valette some three years ago proudly displaying the Rotary flag by the Statue of the founder of our beautiful city, on 23 February Rotary International foundation day. Another group this year posed with our banner having the Valletta skyline in the background. President Godfrey Swain, Incoming Pres Clare Vassallo, Past President Bryan Sullivan and veteran Rot Maru Zeeman and brand new Rotarian Christine Dalli.
- 6) On 5th April, 2019, an interesting event was coordinated between District 2100, District governor Salvatore Iovine, and District 2110, Governor Gianbattista Sallemi represented by PDG John Degiorgio. This envisaged the idea of *Pax Mediterranea* seeing a peace walk from Scala, the birthplace of Gerardo Sacco founder of the Order of the Knights of St John, to Assisi, Rome, Malta and then across the Mediterranean to the Holy Places.
- 7) Malta being the final seat of the Knights of the Order of St John, in the presence of Gov Iovine, PDG John Degiorgio and the then President of RCLVM Brian Gibbs, the book entitled 'Gerardo Sacco, Apostle of Peace' was presented at Our lady of Victory Church. Among the speakers was the local representative of the Order, Knight Daniel De Petri Testaferata who gave a clear depiction of the history of the Order while Ms Simone Mizzi, Executive secretary of Din l-Art Helwa, recounted the story of Our lady of Victory Church.

Gerardo Sacco had attended the first school of Medicine in Salerno and departed from his homeland, in Campania, in the 12th century to create hospitals in the Holy Land to serve pilgrims in their quest towards to holy

city of Jerusalem. This brotherhood of medical assistants, eventually also became a crusading order, the Order of the Knights of St John.

- 8) Conscious as we are, of our ties with the city of Valletta, we often organise our convivals in restaurants in the city. Also, very well attended are tours when we visit particular aspects of this city with its mysteries and its secrets, both holy and profane! Recently, the club visited the Augustinian convent of St Catherine in Republic street.
- 9) Christmas choirs, here we see a children's choir, are often sponsored seeing a collaboration with Din l-Art Helwa curators of Victory Church. And when the beautiful book which tells the story of the restoration of Our lady of Victory Church was presented, Rotarian Mro Diego Cannizzaro performed organ music on the 18th century Santucci organ which had recently been restored by organ expert Robert Buhagi
- 10) In my second year of Presidency, I roped in the help of Rotarians Sandra Dingli and Daphne Palmer Morewood to organise a fundraising Quiz night. All questions were related to Valletta and there were grand prizes for the winners. The funds collected went for the purchase of a state-of-the-art cooker for the Senglea Salesians Youth club.
- 11) The youths together with their mentor, Father Antoine, participated in the quiz. But the winners were a group of jolly fun-loving fellows who we see in the second photo happy to have won a good selection of wines.
- 12) When the cooker was delivered to the youth centre in Senglea, Don Antoine sent us these photos of happy kids. This to me is 'Joy in Rotary'!
- 13) Still, I must say that our most worthwhile contribution to Valletta has certainly been the funds given to Casa Gironda a residence designed to support young men and women who, after spending their childhood in state or church-run institutional care, must leave these facilities upon turning 18. Managed by Agenzija Appogg, a Maltese government agency, Casa Gironda features eight independent apartments, each accommodating 2 to 4 residents. Rotary Club La Valette, in President Michael Balzan's year, played a vital role in this project, contributing furnishings and appliances, including washing machines, tumble dryers, fridges, TVs, kettles, microwaves, toasters, cookware, tableware, bedding, towels, carpets, and curtains. Additionally, members and friends of the club donated pre-loved furniture items, such as bedroom sets and sofas, which were upcycled and repurposed.
Casa Gironda was officially inaugurated by District Governor Orazio Agrò in February 2023 and welcomed its first residents in June 2023.
- 14) During President Catherine Calleja's year of service, we opted to fund the cost for erecting a stele commemorating the fact that our Valletta is a

UNESCO protected city. Some members are seen here together with PDG John Degiorgio by the column which is placed on Tritoni Square at the entrance of our capital city.

- 15) This second photo was taken when RC Vittoria, Sicilia, joined our club as together with also Rotary Club Malta we had been awarded the FODD, Fondi del Distretto, for a project in favour of the Little Sisters of the poor.
- 16) By this same commemorative UNESCO Column, I suggest that we must all take a photo together, as this is the core reason of our meeting here to celebrate the beauty of our historic European cities, the **pride of our European built heritage**.

Rotary Club La Valette Malta and its ties to our capital city VALLETTA

Our banner shows the skyline of the city of Valletta



Charter day Sunday 7th
April 2002 – Rotary Club
la Valette Malta
with
Int Pres Richard D. King
and District Governor
Timineri



Façade of Our lady of Victory Church, Valletta



Grand Master Jean de Valette stands opposite Our Lady of Victory Church

- The original church, as built by Grandmaster Valette, was much smaller having one main altar and two side altars. The Baroque façade was added later. On his death 22 August 1568, GM Valette was buried in the crypt. This was the first Conventual church of the Knights until the completion of St John's co-cathedral in 1577.



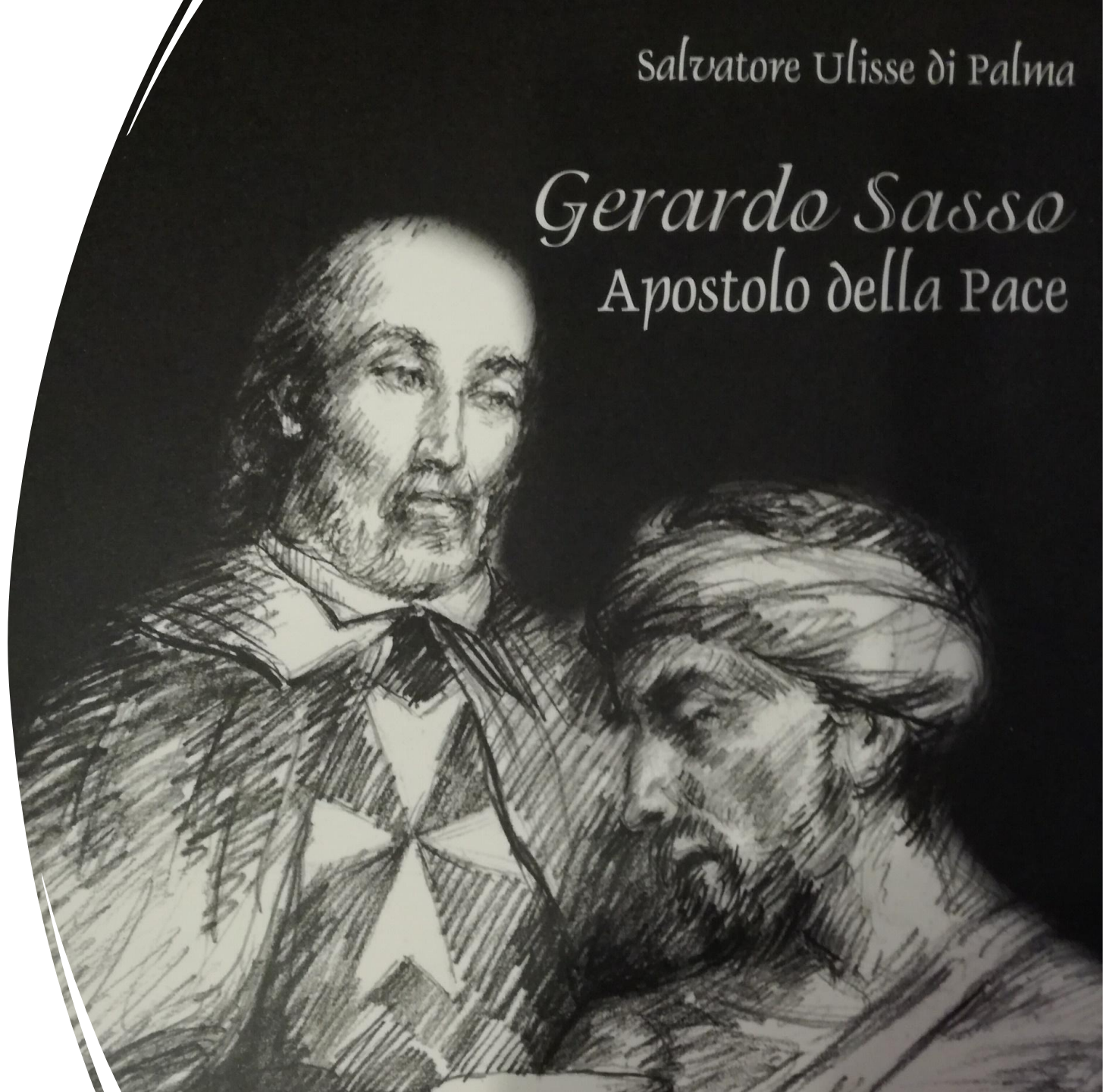


Rotary International Foundation day pictures

Book presentation at Our lady of Victory Church
'Beato Gerardo Sasso – Apostolo della Pace'. Blessed Gerard was the founder of the order of the Knights of St John known as the Knights of Malta. He has studied at the medical school of Salerno and went to the Holy Land to assist the pilgrims travelling there. This was a collaboration between RC La Valette Malta and Distretto Rotary 2100

Salvatore Ulisse di Palma

Gerardo Sasso
Apostolo della Pace





The Augustinian Convent and Church of St Catherine in Valletta

one of the many visits to the city organized for our club members.





Quiz Night – All about Valletta



Funds raised were used to purchase a state of the art cooker for the Senglea Salesians youth club



Inauguration of Casa Gironda Shelter for youths

The Unveiling by
PDG Orazio Agrò
assisted by Gov
Assistant Bryan
Sullivan



Casa Gironda took in first residents in June 2023



Past President Catherine Calleja attended the first Rotarian UNESCO cities congress in Urbino





Inauguration of the stele commemorating Valletta as UNESCO walled city with the then DG John Degiorgio, another RC La Valette Malta initiative.

Rotary Club Vittoria, Sicilia, visit Malta in May 2022



