

The
St John's
Co-Cathedral
Foundation

ANNUAL REPORT
1 August 2014 – 31 July 2015

The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation

Council Members 2014-2015

Mgr Carmel Zammit, President

Dr Ray Bondin

Mr Wilfrid Buttigieg

Mgr Louis Camilleri

Dr Philip Farrugia Randon

Mgr. Lawrence Mifsud

The background of the entire page is a black and white photograph of a classical sculpture. In the foreground, a cherub (putto) is shown from the back, leaning forward. The cherub has large, feathered wings and curly hair. In the background, there is a portrait of an older man with a long, curly wig, wearing a military-style coat with epaulettes. The portrait is set within an ornate, carved frame.

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CONTENTS

	Introduction	3
1.	Conservation Projects	7
2.	Restoration and Maintenance Works	27
3.	Operational Projects	43
4.	Programmes and Initiatives	45
5.	Recruitment	49
6.	Concerts	51
7.	Distinguished Visitors at St John's Co-Cathedral	55



INTRODUCTION

St John's Co-Cathedral is one of Europe's finest churches and listed as a World Heritage site by UNESCO. It is a unique monument of international importance and is a gem of baroque art. The Order of the Knights Hospitaller of St John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta built this extraordinary edifice as their conventual church in the 1570s. The Co-Cathedral is an outstanding treasure house because the Grand Masters and the Knights donated gifts of high artistic value and made enormous contributions to enrich the church with only the best works of art by leading artists of the time. The numerous artefacts, by artists including the renowned Caravaggio and Mattia Preti, which embellish the Co-Cathedral are the artistic and religious heritage of hundreds of years of glorious history that is at the same time both Maltese and European. St John's has become the pride of the Maltese nation and the main attraction for visitors to the island.

The Knights were noblemen and came from some of the distinguished families of Europe. After the unprecedented attack by the Ottoman Empire on Malta, known as the Great Siege, in 1565, the Knights, as defenders of the Catholic faith, vowed to turn Malta into a fortress that befitted a military order with a capital city worthy of an illustrious order of noblemen. Pride of place in the centre of the new city was reserved for their conventual church. The building was completed in 1577 and dedicated to St John the Baptist, the patron saint of the Order. The Order was organised into eight '*langues*' representing the different regions of Europe and each of the eight langues was eventually provided with a chapel within the Co-Cathedral for its particular devotion in parallel with an *auberge* which each langue inhabited within the city of Valletta.

The basic mannerist architecture of St John's Co-Cathedral is one of military austerity reflecting the sober mood of the Order after the Great Siege. It is an outstanding contrast to its gradual transformation into a glorious baroque interior of rich marbles, monuments, exuberant tapestries and lavish decorative ensembles that overwhelm the visitor with an impressive but harmonious vision. The interior, which consists of a wide nave with a barrel vault and two aisles divided into side chapels, was originally equally simple to the exterior. However, in the seventeenth century Grand Master Nicolas Cotoner ordered the complete redecoration of the interior. The dawn of the seventeenth century ushered in the new baroque style and its flamboyant and demonstrative character provided ample decorative material. The Italian artist Mattia Preti, who was commissioned with the embellishment work, transformed the interior into a celebration of baroque art. The contrast between the simple and sober external façade and





the festive mood of the interior is a major characteristic that makes St John's such a unique monument.

Preti was one of the most outstanding artists of the seventeenth century. Starting with the vault, he depicted episodes from the life of St John the Baptist. With his perfect draughtsmanship and skilful use of colour, Preti produced a masterpiece of dramatic scenes and illusionistic architectural effects. On designs prepared also by Preti the plain walls of the nave and the chapels were carved with elaborate motifs characteristic of baroque ornamentation, transforming the walls into a harmonised though very varied riot of gilded foliage, flowers, angels and other symbols.

St John's Co-Cathedral houses one of the most exceptional marble inlaid floors in the world. This outstanding floor decoration consists of a splendid collection of tombstones that commemorate high ranking Knights. The imaginative designs and the extensive use of symbols and heraldic devices make this floor a unique treasure. Several Latin inscriptions reveal the individual stories of important Knights, their acts of chivalry and religious ardour for which they wished to be remembered.

St John's Co-Cathedral is still an extremely active sanctuary and holy place of veneration. It hosts some of the most important church celebrations and state events.

The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation was established in 2001 following an agreement between the Government and the Catholic Church in Malta. The Foundation is administered by a Council composed of six members, three appointed by the Prime Minister and three by the Archbishop of Malta.

The Foundation is responsible for the administration of St John's Co-Cathedral as a national, religious, architectural, cultural and historic monument. Conservation and restoration of the priceless works of art and artefacts preserved within the Co-Cathedral and its museum are the main priorities of the Foundation which utilizes most of the revenue generated throughout the year towards the execution of projects with the aim of keeping this Maltese jewel of international fame in the best possible condition for the admiration of present as well as future generations.

During the year in review the Foundation, under the presidency of Mgr Carmel Zammit and directed by the Curator Cynthia de Giorgio, continued implementing its large scale holistic plan to restore and conserve the priceless works of art and artefacts preserved in St John's Co-Cathedral and its museum. The planning and design of the extension and refurbishment of the museum was one of the main projects during the year. A detailed report follows to support this claim and to indicate clearly the Foundation's implementation of its mission statement.





1. CONSERVATION PROJECTS

1.1 The Extension and Refurbishment of the St John's Co-Cathedral Museum Project

The Foundation has been working on a major project to extend and refurbish the Co-Cathedral's museum. The main intention of this project is to extend and modernise the museum, in order to properly display most of the works of art and other exhibits in a fully accessible manner that is indicative of the importance, relevance and value of each artefact. The refurbishment will consist of exhibiting artefacts in the appropriate conservation conditions and in the correct sequence. The extension will consist of creating adequate space and distance for visitors to view and appreciate the *objets d'art* according to the scale and materials of the artefacts. The project will enable the St John's Co-Cathedral complex to better provide for the increased numbers of visitors and attract more visitors as an educational institution and as a cultural and tourist attraction.

The refurbishment of the current museum on the Merchants Street side of the Co-Cathedral block of buildings which was built in 1960 to house as many artefacts as possible within the limited spaces available will be modernised. The project will address the fact that both society and museology have changed considerably within the last fifty years since the museum was opened. The way in which visitors prefer to look, listen, learn and appreciate has also changed radically as a result of higher education, together with the rise of cultural tourism and globalization. A visitor's experience is expected to be informative, educational and enjoyable. It can no longer be assumed that visitors share the knowledge of the art and history of Europe, or the Catholic faith. These facts and considerations have consequences for the manner in which the museum communicates its contents and story to the public.

The present exhibition spaces of the museum are inadequate for a proper exposition of the available artefacts and only part of the collection is on display. The restricted areas do not provide the space for a potentially unique informative experience which should be both comfortable and enjoyable. The current museum seriously lacks accessibility for persons with mobility difficulties.

The main objective of the museum will be to highlight the most important collections and artistic contributions. Some of the most significant artistic features are the works of Caravaggio, Mattia Preti and the Flemish Tapestries. Mattia Preti's most important and largest artistic works can be found in the church, which can be considered as a Mattia Preti Museum.





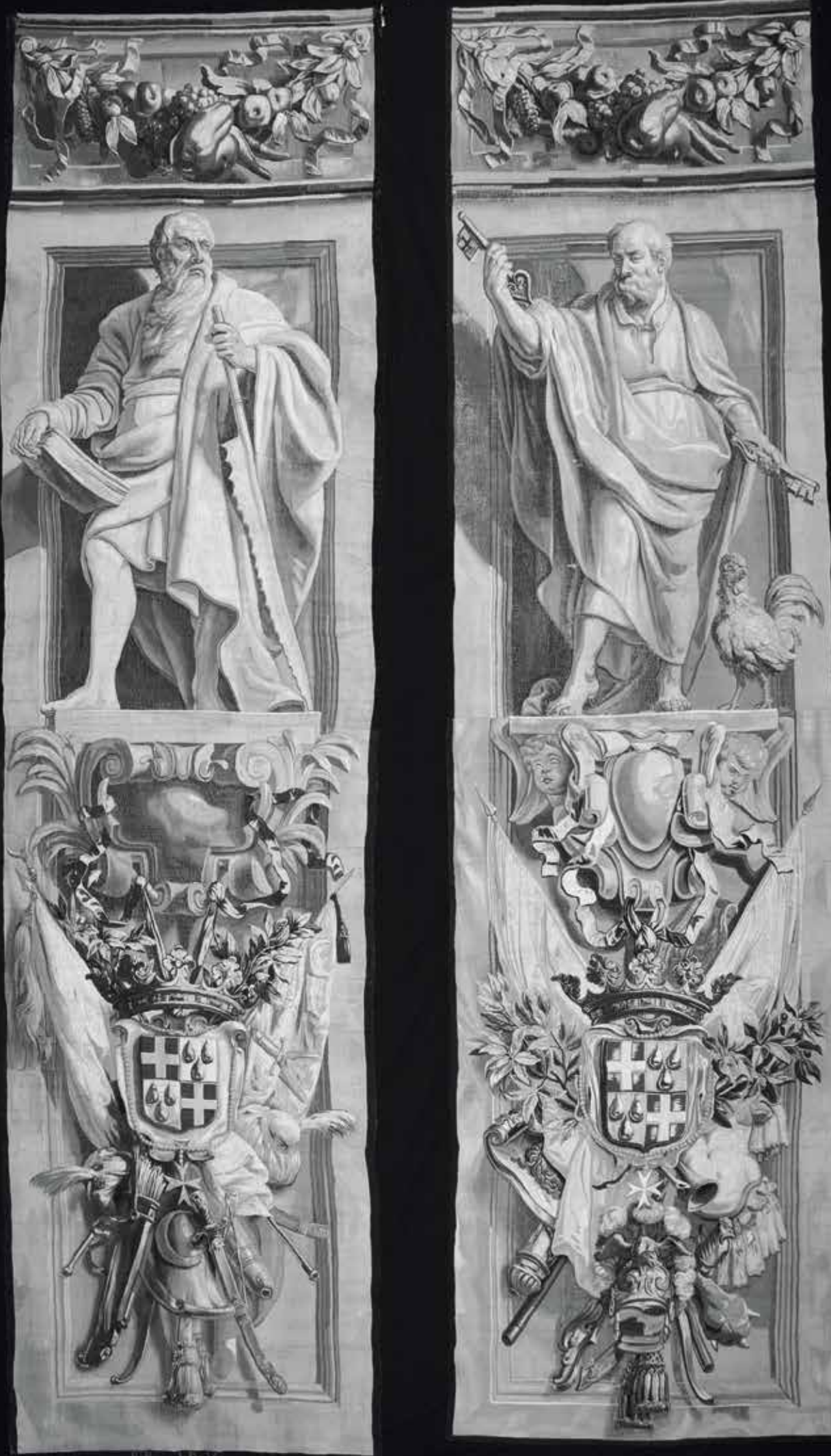
A main focus of the museum will be the expanded awareness of the renowned artist Caravaggio by creating a Caravaggio Centre. The Centre will be equipped with the latest technologies to support a didactic approach to the artist, his enormous impact on his followers and the artistic scene in general.

The Co-Cathedral possesses the largest set of Flemish tapestries, the majority of which are based on designs prepared by the artist Peter Paul Rubens. The large dimensions of the series of tapestries require adequate space and the use of didactic methods to be better and fully appreciated and to bring about the awareness of the artistic importance of the tapestries. The silver collection that is presently hidden in the reserved collection will be housed in the Bartolott crypt also presently closed to the public. The collection of illuminated choral manuscripts and the collection of sacred vestments of great artistic value which are only exhibited in part will be displayed in full. The *Cappella Ardente*, which is a unique funerary wooden structure, will also be exhibited. All of the artefacts exhibited will be given the correct climatic conditions to ensure their long term conservation.

A visitors' centre will be installed at the new entrance to the museum on Merchants Street with adequate space to facilitate comfortable entry for both, group visits and individuals. The extension will ease the horizontal and vertical flow of visitors, between the new entrance, the Bartolott Crypt and the adjacent exhibition spaces. Safe, comfortable and easy access to the museum, at all levels, will be provided for all visitors of all abilities. The proposed extension of the Co-Cathedral Museum will be designed to enhance the visitor spread and relieve the conservation pressures of the spacial limitations of the church. Measures will be taken to ensure the protection and conservation of the existing fabric whilst enabling the Co-Cathedral to still play a prominent role in the development of Malta as a tourist destination.

In August 2013, the Foundation commissioned Architecture Project Ltd to undertake the proposal to extend the existing museum and to rehabilitate spaces currently underutilised within the museum premises. The concept development stage was carried out between August 2013 and February 2014. The scheme design was completed in August 2014 and an application was submitted to the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA).





1.2 Restoration of the Flemish Tapestries

The project that the St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation started in 2006 to restore the priceless set of tapestries is progressing this year with seven tapestries being restored by the Royal Manufacturers De Wit Laboratories in Belgium. The condition of the tapestries had deteriorated with the passage of time and they could no longer be exhibited. Restoration was required to ensure their preservation. In the year under review the tapestries depicting *'The Adoration of the Magi'* and *'The Entry into Jerusalem'*, treated in 2013, were returned after restoration. The pieces being treated during this year are two large tapestries depicting *'The Triumph over Idolatry'* and *'The Resurrection'* and five smaller pieces depicting the Apostles.

The tapestries had originally been woven in Brussels by the tapestry merchant and weaver Judocus de Vos in the late seventeenth century. The set was commissioned by Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Roccaful who had just been elected Grand Master and wished to furnish the Knights' Conventual Church of St John in Valletta with a series of tapestries to be hung on specific feasts. The set of tapestries depicts the theme of the Triumph of the Eucharist. The larger tapestries of the set were woven on cartoons based on creations by the renowned Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens. The commission consisted of twenty-nine pieces and is the largest set of tapestries made during the Baroque Age in the world. The fourteen large tapestries measure approximately 6.70 by 6.20 meters and depict scenes from the life of Christ and allegories portraying the principal and fundamental divine truths of the Catholic faith. Another fourteen smaller panels represent the Virgin Mary, Christ the Saviour and the Apostles. One tapestry portrays the benefactor, Grand Master Perellos.

The tapestries were woven in pure silk and wool and since with the passage of time textiles are susceptible to deterioration their restoration was necessary in order to preserve them. The restoration process consists of the removal of accumulated dust from the surface, followed by the application of a fine mist solution of water and solvents until the fabric is thoroughly cleansed. The tapestry is dried by a special quick-drying process to avoid shrinkage. Earlier restoration interventions are then removed, loose parts and threads are consolidated and open seams repaired. The tapestry is then fitted with a new supportive backing and lining to prevent deterioration.

The Foundation was provided with air transport for the tapestries to and from Belgium courtesy of the Belgian Ministry of Defence and with the assistance of the Belgian Ambassador to Malta, H. E. Mr Vincent Mertens de Wilmars and the Maltese Ambassador in Belgium, H. E. Ms Vanessa Frazier.





1.3 Restoration of the Blessed Gerard paintings by Mattia Preti and the Gilded Frames within the Oratory

The conservation of the paintings in the Oratory commenced this year with the restoration of two paintings depicting *Blessed Gerard*. The paintings executed by Mattia Preti in 1680 for the presbytery of the Oratory are part of a set of ten paintings commissioned by Prior Lomellini depicting the various saints of the Order. The paintings represent *Blessed Gerard Tending to the Sick* as the founder and first rector of the Order and *The Miracle of the Loaves*. Both of the oil on canvas paintings required restoration together with the larger gilt wooden decorative frames. The canvas had sustained damage from water infiltration causing lifting in some areas of the paint layers and severe craquelure of the background. The varnish was severely oxidised, rendering the paintings dark, obscuring the visibility of the subject and detracting from their appreciable artistic value.

Restoration intervention on the paintings

The aim of the restoration was to revive the original colours of the paintings which had become dark due to the aging of the protective varnish used during the last intervention. The two paintings were removed from their frames and were placed in the restoration laboratory of the Co-Cathedral.

Photographic surveys were carried out with the use of raking light, UV light and IR light to test for the presence of over painting carried out by previous restoration interventions.

The tarnished varnish and some overpaint were removed using a variety of tested solvents appropriate for this procedure. A morphological survey was then carried out using the RTI technique.

The back of the painting *The Blessed Gerard Tending to the Sick* was treated in order to remove the relining added in a previous restoration intervention. Weak parts of the canvas support were treated with strip-lining. The old wooden stretcher, which was not the original, was replaced since the supporting bars had warped and were not repairable. The new stretcher frame was built with expandable corners ensuring the best straining of the canvas. The canvas deformations of both paintings were eliminated by using a low pressure table.

Flaking or detachments of the paint layer were consolidated by using an acrylic resin diluted in water and pressed with a heated spatula. Lacunae were filled with *Gesso di Bologna* bonded with rabbit skin glue. All the lacunae and abrasions were retouched using water based pigments and touched up with varnish colours. Finally layers of varnish were applied on the surface of the paintings in order to level out the tones and to protect the paint layers from further oxidation.





Restoration intervention on the gilt wooden decorative frames

The paintings had two frames: a narrow wooden frame and a wider decorative wooden frame attached to the wall. The narrow wooden frames of both paintings, which were not original, were replaced as they were in a poor state of conservation. The gilding technique used for the new frames followed the technique that was originally used on the previous frames.

The wider decorative frames attached to the wall were constructed in wood and finished with white paint and water gilding. Both of the frames were damaged, especially the one holding the painting *Blessed Gerard Tending to the Sick*, which was in a very bad state of conservation due to past water infiltration that had seeped through the window above the painting. The water had caused the wood to expand and contract, with the consequential creation of cracks and fissures in the wood, the loss of the preparatory layers and of the gilding.

The frames were restored on site. The consolidation of the plaster and gilding were carried out in order to repair the wood and all the missing areas were restored using the same wood and epoxy based putty. Then an insecticide was applied in order to prevent woodworm infestation.

The surface was cleaned using different solvents for both the gilding and the painted areas. Holes and lacunae were filled with *Gesso di Bologna* bonded with rabbit skin glue.

The re-gilding was carried out using the original water gilding technique and 23.75ct gold leaf and burnished accordingly whilst the white paint was reintegrated using the same original tempera technique. The final stage consisted of the application of a layer of protective varnish to protect the gilding from surface dirt deposits.

The restoration intervention of the painting depicting *The Miracle of the Loaves* was possible thanks to the sponsorship of The Maltese Association of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. *Blessed Gerard Tending to the Sick* was due to the kind sponsorship of The M. Demajo Group. The restoration intervention was entrusted to Prevarti Co. Ltd., headed by Pierre Bugeja.





1.4 Restoration of the Main Façade and Bell Towers

The project for the restoration of the main façade and bell towers of St John's Co-Cathedral commenced during the year under review. The restoration intervention was projected to conserve the exterior walls and the exterior and interior chambers of the bell towers.

The Foundation commissioned architectural firm *TBA periti* to conduct a condition assessment survey of the exterior architectural fabric to establish a conservation strategy and programme that included graphical documentation of the masonry. A detailed photographic record of the areas, in their current state, along with mapping of the areas of deterioration, was also made. Areas that had been rendered or plastered were also identified in order to have an illustrated description of the areas requiring intervention. The report also consisted of a description of the current situation on the basis of detailed visual examinations carried out on site, including an appraisal of all elements to be restored or changed.

Upon detailed examination, it was found that the buildings and structures manifest a wide range of deterioration problems which vary according to location, exposure and also the type of stone used. The deterioration of the materials is due to the interaction of the stone with its intrinsic properties - composition, texture and structure - and the external environmental conditions. Given the local conditions and the building materials, the main causes of deterioration identifiable on the various façades of St. John's Co-Cathedral are one or more of the following, with varying degrees of importance:

- water (rising damp, rainwater infiltration, direct sea spray attack, etc.)
- salt contamination (soil infill, cement, proximity to sea, pollution, etc.)
- biological factors (lichens, fungi, etc.)
- human intervention (faulty repairs, neglect, vandalism, etc.)
- other factors (fire damage, structural damage, war damage, etc.)

The presence of water was also a key factor in the deterioration of the stone, mortars and plasters.

The results of detailed mapping carried out of the various weathering forms showed that the prevailing deterioration of the Globigerina limestone fabric of the façade was limited to alveolar, powdering or flaking and general weathering of the stone surface, localised scaling and cracking as a result of mechanical damage. The surface of the limestone had also been subjected to several previous repair interventions. The surface was also affected by black crusts, soot and dirt deposition, by biological infestation, in the form of algae, moulds, lichens and higher plants and by stains caused by rust, water, paint, or graffiti. Cement has been used and, in fact, there were numerous areas which were rendered with a cement based plaster. Cement was also





used for pointing. The information compiled included a detailed mapping of the different weathering forms.

TBA periti assisted the Foundation with the submission of the permit application for the restoration to the Malta Environment and Planning Authority.

The restoration project is being co-financed by the Foundation and the Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government. The work is being carried out by the Restoration Directorate under the direction of Arch. Norbert Gatt and Arch. Jean Frendo. The duration of the works is projected to last three years.

The restoration works commenced in September 2014 with the installation of the necessary scaffolding to cover the entire façade. The restoration philosophy for the project will be of minimal intervention carried out with sensitivity to retain the original stonework and patina that has occurred over time. The restoration methods used will follow approved conservation methods after taking into consideration the condition of the fabric of the original Globigerina masonry. By August 2015 the restoration of the central part of the façade, covering over two hundred square meters had been completed.

The front façade, and in particular the central areas, had suffered water staining, the flow of which also tended to encourage deterioration and several mortar joints and parts of the pointing were exposed, leading to water infiltration. The restoration consisted of mechanical cleaning using appropriate brushes to remove loose dirt deposits and plaster. The surface of the stone was then washed using de-ionised water. In particular areas a low pressure wash was used to remove encrustation. Stubborn encrustations and water stains, particularly underneath the cornices, corbels and other protrusions, were removed with the application of poultices soaked with appropriate cleaning solutions. In certain mortar joints there were signs of vegetation growth (in some cases weeds) and these were removed to ensure that no re-growth would occur. Also, any holes which had been drilled through the fabric to accommodate a number of services were adequately sealed to ensure no water infiltration.

The masonry surface was thus cleaned from residual plaster, defective pointing and mortar joints. Cement based materials used for rendering purposes carried out in previous interventions were removed and replaced with a lime-based mortar. Specific stone units of the masonry that showed signs of alveolar erosion were treated with plastic repair. Some stone units, particularly in the lower courses, showed advanced signs of alveolar deterioration and extensive flaking that penetrated a considerable proportion of the stone unit; such units were replaced with a similar quality of Globigerina stone.





1.5 Main Façade Lighting

In conjunction with the restoration of the main façade, the Foundation appointed engineer Stephen Buttigieg of TMI Ltd., to design an effective lighting system that would illuminate and enhance the appearance of the façade of the Co-Cathedral during night time.

The lighting design is to be of soft illumination and would focus on the prominent features of the façade such as the steeples, the main door and the balcony.

Following a call for tenders, Brighter Solutions Ltd was awarded the project for the installation of the lighting system. The façade is to be washed with light from points available on the buildings opposite and there will be 360° lighting of the belfries. The main portal will be lit by floor lights inserted in the parvis.

The project is currently being implemented and will be completed by the next financial year.



1.6 Restoration of the Baldachin over the High Altar

Restoration of the gilt wooden frame of the baldachin

The gilt frame of the baldachin hanging over the high altar is composed mainly of four horizontal water-gilt and burnished reed pieces. These components are entwined with gilt, carved wood acanthus leaves. Winged *putti* stand at the corners of the frame, whilst on the frontal horizontal element rests an emblem exhibiting the IHS Christogram. The drapery of the baldachin is held together with a gilded wooden balustrade whilst fifty-six wooden gilt tassels adorn the edges of the drapery.

The aim of the restoration was to restore the original aesthetical qualities of the structure damaged as a consequence of the deterioration of the materials with the passage of time. Apart from the good state of conservation of the supporting structure, some cracks and fractures were present as well as several losses whilst the majority of the gilt layer was consumed and eroded. Numerous previous interventions have been identified, most of which date to the twentieth century.

The first restoration procedure was on the wooden support, where cracks and fractures were present. The latter were reinforced by inserting glass fibre bars. Several cleaning tests were carried out on the surfaces in order to establish the nature of the overlaid varnishes and examine the extent of the deterioration of the gilt decorative scheme. Identified missing sculptural elements were reconstructed and the metal elements used during the last restoration were treated with an anti-corrosion coating.

The lacunae of the gold leaf and abrasions that appeared in several areas were filled with a preparatory layer of *Gesso di Bologna* and rabbit skin glue to prepare the surface for re-gilding.

The re-gilding was performed using the same technique originally performed on the four horizontal elements, particularly details of the hair locks and the wings of the cherubs, the emblem and the accompanying wooden balustrade using a water gilding technique. The facial features of the cherubs, the acanthus leaves and the other ornamental tassels were re-gilded using an oil based technique.

Once the gilding was completed, varnish was applied on the surface in order to protect the gilt layer. Finally, a thin layer of microcrystalline wax was applied to the surface as a further barrier from atmospheric conditions.

The restoration was carried out by James Saliba of Wood Conservation Ltd.

New white baldachin dress

According to church rituals baldachins are dressed with white fabric during liturgical solemnities such as Easter and Christmas.





The nineteenth century white fabric of the baldachin over the high altar was in a poor state of conservation. For this reason, the St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation decided to replace the antique hand embroidered dress with a fabric made from silk and gold lama with identical gold embroidery and decorated with a gold fringe and tassels replicating the original one. The new baldachin was hung in December 2015.

The baldachin is made up of twenty-eight panels embroidered with decorative motifs in gold, yellow and dark red silk all respecting the composition of the antique white baldachin. A new ceiling for the baldachin, referred to as the *cielo*, was made from the same fabric embroidered with stars and the symbol of the Holy Spirit in the centre.

The production of the baldachin was carried out by the Italian firm Serpone Srl of Naples, renowned for manufacturing and supplying church furniture and furnishings. Serpone Srl is represented in Malta by the firm E. Theuma & Co. Ltd.





2. RESTORATION AND MAINTENANCE WORKS

2.1 Conservation of the Inlaid Marble Floor

The unique floor of the Co-Cathedral consists of four hundred inlaid marble tombstones dating from the early seventeenth century to the nineteenth century. The tombstones are the resting place of some of the most illustrious Knights of the Order coming from different European regions. The majority of the designs for the marble tombstones were made by renowned artists and were often executed by Maltese craftsmen. They are all original in design and as a result they are truly unique works of art. Each one is made of a large marble slab that is inlaid with polychrome marble and embellished with symbols of virtues, death and immortality, such as eagles, lions, crowns, skeletons, skulls and angels. The delicately engraved Latin epitaphs, together with a range of symbols, illustrate the life story of the deceased as well as his valorous deeds and achievements.

Though marble is considered to be an enduring material it suffers from damage caused by abrasion. The inlaid designs and motifs made of thin marble on the tombstones are also susceptible to cracking with the passage of time as well as weight leading to losses in the inlaid marble layer. The restoration of the inlaid marble tombstones is executed according to a priority conservation management plan.

The Foundation employs two full-time marble restorers to repair and preserve the tombstones as well as the marble monuments. The laborious work involves the skilful consolidation of any loose parts and the replacement of missing pieces. The restoration of the tombstones is an arduous task and is the main occupation of the in-house marble restorer Jesmond Bartolo. The restoration and conservation of this precious floor consists of replacing the missing inlaid parts with matching marble, which is often very difficult to obtain, using the appropriate techniques. All restoration is recorded and documented.

During this year restoration was carried out on tombstones commemorating: Guillaume Francois Bernart Avernoes, Jean Gabriel de Polastron La Hiliere le Dain and Salatore Imbroll in the main nave and Francois de Foresta Collengue in the Chapel of Anglo-Bavaria. The aim was to restore large or small losses that recurred due to the passage of time. Materials used during past restoration interventions not compatible with the marble were removed. All the tombstones in the main nave were examined and each tombstone that had sustained losses was cleaned up and replacement was carried out with new marble parts of the same type and colour.





Additional maintenance operations were carried out on twenty-eight tombstones in the main nave including those under the protective carpets. The marble floor was cleaned and polished in order to remove the surface dirt deposit and to maintain the natural brilliance of the marble. The restoration of tombstones is carried out by the marble restorer Jesmond Bartolo under the direction of Adriana Alescio, the Foundation's conservator.

In order to protect the tombstones from further abrasion caused primarily by visitors who walk through the Co-Cathedral on a daily basis, the tourist route on the Co-Cathedral floor is covered by a protective carpet.





2.2 Restoration of the Gilded and Polychrome Surfaces

The maintenance project of the restoration of the gilded and polychrome surfaces started in March 2014 with the aim of stabilising the conservation conditions of the gilded and coloured embellishments within the Co-Cathedral thus protecting further deterioration. The project consists mainly of consolidation carried out on the areas where the state of conservation has shown some type of deterioration as a consequence of atmospheric conditions.

The areas treated in the maintenance programme were the painted and gilded surfaces on the south side of the church, in particular the entrance to the Oratory, the Chapel of Castile and the Chapel of Aragon and the dado of all the chapels. The gilded surfaces of the pillars of the arches facing the nave were also examined and treated. The conservation problems were mainly caused by rising damp and salts and the consequential detachment and de-cohesion of the gold and the colours from the stone; the deposits of dust and particularly air pollution that accumulated over the years causing the gold to appear dull and grey; the solubilisation of the binder used for the application of the gold leaf and the consequential loss of the brilliance of the gold. The damaged areas were consolidated with the most suitable materials. The abrasions and the lacunae of the coloured surfaces were retouched with watercolours whilst the losses in the gilding were reintegrated using the same gold leaf as the original technique. All the surfaces were dusted and cleaned in order to remove the different kinds of deposits.

The pilasters facing the nave where the gold had completely lost its brilliance were cleaned, stabilised and buffed. In accordance with the aesthetic quality of the interiors of the Co-Cathedral, all the abrasions and the areas where the gold leaf appeared poor and dull were reintegrated with the same quality of gold leaf and gilding technique as had originally been carried out. The type of binder using an oil based medium proved to be the most suitable for the inner microclimate of the church and was found to be the best solution to ensure the longevity of the gilding. Maintenance treatments are projected to be carried out frequently to avoid the accumulation of dust during the years as well as monitoring of the rising salts on the surfaces in order to preserve the integrity of the decorations.

The maintenance project and the restoration works were carried out under the direction of the Foundation's curator Cynthia de Giorgio and conservator Adriana Alescio.





2.3 Conservation of the Funerary Monument of the Grand Master Fra Jean Paule de Lascaris Castellar

The funerary monument of the Grand Master Fra Jean Paule de Lascaris Castellar situated in the Chapel of the Langue of Provence is the artwork of the Italian artist Vitale Covatti, dated to 1658.

The monument consists of an architectural structure made of white Carrara marble, with decorative elements carved in coloured marbles. It consists of a pedestal bearing a brief description of the Grand Master's life, engraved and encased within a carved yellow marble curtain. The bottom of the pedestal is emblazoned with three armorial shields, which are the coats-of-arms of the Knights de Mandolx, Doria del Mare and De Blacas d'Aups made from yellow, red and black marble. Above the pedestal rests the coat-of-arms of the Grand Master surmounted by the magisterial crown. The coat-of-arms consists of four quadrants representing alternately the two-headed eagle made with black marble on yellow background and the white cross on a red background. On top of the shield rests the bust of the Grand Master topped with a moulded frame on a black background. The summit of the monument is decorated with two scrolls serving as pedestals for two cherubs that form part of the frieze of the wall of the Chapel of Provence. The two cherubs holding the flags of the Order are supported by two majestic double-headed crowned eagles as symbols from the Lascaris coat-of-arms.

The monument was found to be in a structurally good condition. Therefore, reviving the aesthetic qualities of the monument was the aim of the restoration intervention. This consisted of the removal of thick layers of dust and grime, candle soot and other atmospheric deposits that had accumulated over the years causing the white Carrara marble to appear dull and grey. Tests were carried out to identify the most appropriate cleaning methods to remove the aged wax applied during previous interventions and other deposits.

Subsequently, the monument was waxed, polished and buffed to preserve the natural brilliance of the marble. These operations were carried out by the Foundation's resident marble restorer Raymond Aquilina.





2.4 Conservation of the Funerary Monument of the Grand Master Fra Antoine de Paule

The monument of the Grand Master Fra Antoine de Paule was carved by the Italian sculptor Vitale Covatti, as was the Lascaris monument. It represents a simple and elegant example of the Late Mannerist style. It consists of a base in white Carrara marble with a funerary pedestal in front bearing the Grand Master's heraldic achievement. On the urn above is a very fine bust in white marble of the Grand Master between two angels; one holding the coat-of-arms of the Order and the other the Grand Master's coat-of-arms consisting of the azure peacock, the white cross on the red background and three mullets of eight points in argent. The eight-pointed cross of the Order is placed in the centre of the monument held with scrolls on each side from which cascade two garland pendants of fruit and foliage. The monument is crowned with two cherubs holding the standards of the Religion. Supporting them are two peacocks with tails extending. On the base of the mausoleum is a Latin inscription, engraved on a scroll exalting the Grand Master as a *"Prince very dear and liberal who when living was dearly loved for his qualities and when dead is no less revered"*.

The monument was examined and found to be structurally in good condition; however it had lost its lustre and appeared dull owing to the thick layer of dust and candle soot that had accumulated on the surface over the years.

Specific cleaning tests were carried out to determine the most suitable methodology to remove the different kinds of deposits. The restoration intervention consisted of cleaning the surface of dust and of the several layers of old and dull wax that contributed to the grey appearance of the monument. The marble was treated with a layer of wax to protect the surface and then buffed to obtain the desired finish. The restoration was carried out by the Foundation's resident marble restorer Raymond Aquilina.





2.5 Conservation of the Funerary Monument of the Grand Master Fra Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca

The elegant monument dedicated to the Grand Master Fra Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca is the artwork of the Italian sculptor Vincenzo Pacetti. It was carved in the eighteenth century and represents a fine example of the neoclassical style. The monument represents the Angel of Fame accompanied by a young angel who sits looking at the portrait of the Grand Master, whilst extinguishing a torch indicating the end of his master's life. The angels are a masterly piece of sculpture in pure white Carrara marble. The mosaic portrait is a copy of the original made by Antoine di Favray. It is inserted in a gilded bronze wreath frame topped with foliage motifs. The sculptures and the portrait rest on the sarcophagus made with a dark green marble and trimmed with precious stones. The inscription in the centre bears the name of the Grand Master and the date of his death. The sarcophagus rests on a simple pink alabaster marble base emblazoned with the coat-of-arms of the Grand Master. The monument was examined and the coloured marbles catalogued. Apart from the white *Carrara* marble used for the main sculptures and the white *Statuario* generally used for the coat-of-arms, different types of marble were identified such as *Verde Labrador*, *Verde Alpi*, *Norwegian Rose*, *Serpentino a spacco della Lucania* and *Giallo Antico*.

The aim of the restoration was to remove the deposits of dust and dirt that had accumulated on the surface over the years and to remove the old dull layer of wax applied during the last intervention. The most suitable cleaning solution was adopted for each different kind of marble whilst the bronze frame and the portrait were only dusted. Finally the monument was buffed and treated with a layer of wax to protect the surface from the dust and maintain the natural brilliance of the marble. These operations were carried out by the Foundation's resident marble restorer Raymond Aquilina.





2.6 Environmental Monitoring Study

The constant environmental monitoring programme was set up this year within the St John's Co-Cathedral with the scope to record the interior microclimate of the building through regular and systematic inspection.

The programme consists of documenting the atmospheric environmental changes throughout the year. The monitoring will serve as a database of information for establishing a preservation strategy. The resulting data will aid the assessment of the state of conservation of the several works of art in the church and museum.

The aims of the monitoring programme are to record and analyse fluctuations in the environment and identify problematic conditions before damage to the artefacts is caused and address the conditions before becoming widespread. The data is being captured by temperature and relative humidity loggers at specific points within the church and the museum to log the daily changes of these parameters, in relation to seasonal changes, the opening and closing hours of the church and the museum, and the flow of tourists. Each data logger is set to record the values every hour. The results can show undesired development that could lead to degradation and serve as a basis to plan a maintenance strategy programme. Monthly readings are carried out by the Foundation's conservator and the data is collected for analysis. The data such as temperature, relative humidity and dew point value per hour are transformed into a graph and interpreted. The analysis of the information of the microclimate of the Co-Cathedral and the museum would assist in understanding the patterns of the effects the changing environment may have on the physical and chemical reactions of materials used in the decorative surfaces and the specific materials that constitute the artefacts, such as the marble cladding and gilding, as well as the state of conservation and the rheological behaviour of organic materials of the works of art conserved in the building. Consequently, it is possible to apply the right maintenance and choose the best conservation methodology.



2.7 Electrical Thermography and Inspections at St John's Co-Cathedral

During the period between November 2014 and August 2015, an electrical inspection survey was carried out at St John's Co-Cathedral and museum. The electrical inspection exercise consisted of two main components.

Component One consisted of infrared electrical inspections on the distribution boxes and electrical installations. This system, known as Infrared Thermograph Reading is used to find areas of excess heat (caused by increased resistance) and is essential to tackle problems at the early stages of degeneration, as a corrective measure before a component fails. Thermograph Reading is the best diagnostic tool available to date. The inspection was carried out by Galea Curmi Engineering. The inspection included a thorough examination to detect any hot spots caused by defects in connections and components, any loose or deteriorating components, overloads or defective equipment.

Component Two consisted of infrared scanning of the electrical system and fittings at St John's Co-Cathedral as part of the routine maintenance programme. The results permit the detection of any necessary corrective measures required. The detected faults were followed up by professional electrical personnel and any defects rectified.

Galea Curmi Engineering and Central Power Installations Ltd collaborated and combined their professional work, resulting in the rectification of any thermal anomalies detected. This was further verified and corroborated by another infrared reading after all works were carried out. A full detailed report was submitted by Galea Curmi Engineering certifying that all faults detected had been cleared.



3. OPERATIONAL PROJECTS

3.1 Website and Mobile App Project

During 2015 the decision was taken to redesign the layout of the website and implement a mobile application.

A call for tenders was issued for the design, development and deployment of a Web Portal and a Mobile App. An IT Consultancy and Solution Company, gpICT, acted as consultants for the process of producing the Request for Information. After the selection process Orpheo (Malta) Joint Venture was commissioned with the project. Currently the Web Portal is being implemented, including the website and web app whilst the mobile app will be launched at a later stage.





4. PROGRAMMES AND INITIATIVES

4.1 World Tourism Day

World Tourism Day in conjunction with The United Nations World Tourism Organisation was held on 27 September 2014. The Foundation participated in this event and St John's Co-Cathedral, Oratory and Museum were open free of charge. World Tourism Day has been held since 1980. The purpose of this day is to raise awareness of the role of tourism within the international community and to demonstrate how it affects social, cultural, political and economic values worldwide.

4.2 *Notte Bianca*

The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation participated in this year's *Notte Bianca* held on 4 October by offering free entrance to the Co-Cathedral, Oratory and Museum between 19:00 hrs and midnight. Information about the restoration projects carried out during this financial year was made available in the form of leaflets. Guided tours, in Maltese and English, were held at frequent intervals inside the church and the oratory. The Foundation's in-house restorers demonstrated various restoration procedures such as the application of gold leaf on the stone walls, cleaning of the marble monuments and the maintenance of the inlaid marble floor. A total of 7,126 visitors entered St John's Co-Cathedral.

4.3 The Knights and their Symbols at St John's Co-Cathedral during the Baroque Age

The Foundation, in collaboration with International Institute of Baroque Studies at the University of Malta, organised a lecture titled 'The Knights and their Symbols at St John's Co-Cathedral during the Baroque Age'. The lecture was about the interpretation of the unique symbolism carved into the walls, inlaid in tombstones and captured in paintings and tapestries adorning St John's Co-Cathedral. The lecture was delivered by Cynthia de Giorgio and was held on 18 June 2015.

4.4 Caravaggio on the Frontier

On 14 May 2015, Sandro Debono, Heritage Malta's Senior Curator at the National Museum of Fine Arts, delivered a lecture in the Oratory of The Beheading of St John entitled '*Caravaggio on the Frontier*'. Mr Debono discussed how seventeenth century Malta was the frontier territory on the edge of Catholic Europe. The arguments presented ways in which this may have inspired, influenced or guided Caravaggio's response through his artworks.



4.5 Gilt EnArt Conference, Evora, Portugal

The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation was invited to participate in a conference entitled – *Gilding Materials and Techniques in European Art* – held in Evora, Portugal between the 25 and 27 May 2015.

The Curator, Cynthia de Giorgio, submitted a paper on the conservation and restoration of gilded surfaces at St John's Co-Cathedral and at the conference delivered an illustrated presentation of the restorations carried out on gilt surfaces at St John's Co-Cathedral. The presentation was well received by the participants.

4.6 Scientific Committee for the Preservation of the Marble Inlaid Tombstones

The entire floor of St John's Co-Cathedral is covered with tombstones consisting of a unique collection of over four hundred inlaid marble slabs that commemorate some of the most illustrious Knights of the Order. Each tombstone is made of a large marble slab that is inlaid with polychrome marble and beautifully decorated with symbols of virtues, death and immortality, such as eagles, lions, crowns, skeletons, skulls and angels. The delicately engraved Latin epitaphs together with a range of symbols illustrate the life story of the deceased as well as his valorous deeds and achievements. Though marble is considered to be an enduring material it suffers from damage caused by abrasion. The inlaid designs and motifs made of thin marble on the tombstone are also susceptible to cracking with the passage of time leading to losses in the inlaid marble layer. For the Foundation to continue its objective of preserving the tombstones a Scientific Committee was held this year. The aim of the committee was to observe the state of conservation of the tombstones and make recommendations on how the deterioration could be slowed down.

The Committee was chaired by Dr. Raymond Bondin and attended by Prof. Giorgio Bonsanti, Dr. Francesca Pique and Eng. Giorgio Zavarise. The Committee attended two days of observation and discussions, each member offering their expertise and experience in the various fields of their specialisation.

The Scientific Committee focused on the structure of the tombstones and studied ways in which the tombstones could be preserved from the damage caused by use of the premises. The Committee made their recommendations and suggested methods on how the recommendations could be achieved. The committee submitted a detailed report which outlined the deterioration elements and offered short term remedies as well as long term possible measures to ensure the preservation of the tombstones. The measures will be undertaken by the Foundation.



5. RECRUITMENT

5.1 Conservator

Ms Adriana Alescio was appointed as Restorer-Conservator with the Foundation in September 2014. Ms Alescio has wide experience in restoration of mural and canvas paintings and wood and stone gilding.

5.2 Public Relations Coordinator

In January 2015 the Foundation employed Mr Mark Muscat as Public Relations Coordinator. His main duties are the ongoing development and improvement of public relations and the provision of digital information on St John's Co-Cathedral and Museum. Mr Muscat also coordinates with organisers of concerts and other activities held at St John's.

5.3 Part Time Custodians

Ms Tanya Andrews and Ms Rosalie Farrugia were recruited as part time custodians in March 2015 to complement the current team of custodians.



6. CONCERTS

- As part of the 1st Malta International Organ Festival an organ concert of Sacred Music was held by the Sicilian Organist Diego Cannizzaro on Friday, 5th September 2014 at St John's Co-Cathedral Oratory in aid of *Fondazzjoni Dar Nazareth*.
- A concert of Sacred Music was held by *Fondazzjoni Dar Nazareth* in aid of the same Foundation on Friday 12th September 2014. The concert was under the Artistic Director of Joseph Lia. The programme included works by Johann Sebastian Bach, Andreas Uibo and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.
- "Mozart's Great Sacred Music" Concert by the *Collegium Musicum Choir* and orchestra under the direction of Mro. Prof. Dion Buhagiar was held in aid of the Richmond Foundation on the occasion of World Mental Health Day on Friday, 10th October 2014. This concert was held under the distinguished patronage of H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta. The programme included selections from the *Requiem*, *Alleluja*, *Ave Verum* and from the *Coronation Mass*, all composed by Mozart.
- A choral and orchestral Concert of Sacred Music by Charles Gounod in honour of St. Cecilia in aid of Richmond Foundation was held by St. Paul's Choral Society under the direction of Mro. Hugo Agius Muscat on Friday 21st November 2014. This concert was held also under the distinguished patronage of H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta.
- A concert of Sacred Music by Giacomo Puccini, Gabriel Faure, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Giuseppe Verdi was organised by Terramundi on Monday, 24th November 2014. The musical direction was by Mro. Prof. Dion Buhagiar with the participation of the *Collegium Musicum Choir*.
- The Armed Forces of Malta organised their annual concert of Sacred Music in aid of *Dar tal-Providenza* on Monday, 15th December 2014. The concert of Sacred Music and traditional Christmas carols was under the direction of Mro. Major J.I. Borg.
- The annual Christmas Concert of Carols was held on Friday, 19th December 2014 by the *Collegium Musicum Choir* under the direction of Mro. Prof. Dion Buhagiar. This concert was held in aid of the Church in Need Pontifical Catholic Charity Foundation.
- Johann Sebastian Bach's "St. John Passion" was performed by Joyful Company of Singers and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment



under the direction of Steven Devine on Monday 19th January 2015, as part of the Valletta International Baroque Festival.

- Another concert of Sacred Music by Giacomo Puccini, Gabriel Faure, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Giuseppe Verdi was organised by Terramundi on Saturday, 7th February 2015. The musical direction was by Mro. Prof. Dion Buhagiar with the participation of the *Collegium Musicum Choir*.
- An Oratorio “*Juxta Crucem Lacrymosa*” (*Stabat Mater*), a poem by Frans Sammut set to music by Mro. Prof. Dion Buhagiar, was performed under his musical direction on Thursday, 24th March 2015 with the participation of the *Collegium Musicum Choir*. This concert was held in aid of the Church in Need Pontifical Catholic Charity Foundation and was under the distinguished patronage of H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta.
- The fifth annual orchestral charity concert was organised in aid of the philanthropic activities of the Maltese Association Sovereign Military Order of Malta under the distinguished patronage of The Hon. Prime Minister Dr Joseph Muscat, on Wednesday 17th June 2015. This concert was performed by the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Mro. Prof. Michael Laus with the participation of Soprano Miriam Gauci and the Goldberg Ensemble-Malta. Works by Vivaldi, Handel, Pergolesi, Mozart and others were performed during this Sacred Concert.



7. DISTINGUISHED VISITORS AT ST JOHN'S CO-CATHEDRAL

- H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand
27 August 2014
- H.R.H. Prince William, Duke of Cambridge
21 September 2014
- H.E. Mr Miroslav Lajčák, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic
11 October 2014
- H.E. Kamallesh Sharma, Secretary General of the Commonwealth of Nations
20 November 2014
- The Hon. Liu Peng, General Administration of Sport of the People's Republic of China
19 March 2015
- Mr. Bruno Maçães, Secretary of State for European Affairs of the Republic of Portugal
2 April 2015
- H.E. Rev. Mgr. Salvatore Ligorio, Archbishop of Matera, Italy
9 April 2015
- H.M.E.H. Fra' Robert Matthew Festing, Prince and Grand Master of the Sovereign Military Order of Jerusalem, Rhodes and Malta
16 April 2015
- H.E. Joachim Gauck, President of Germany
30 April 2015
- H.E. Mr George Ciamba, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania
8 May 2015
- Mr. Harlem Désir, French Secretary of State for European Affairs
12 May 2015
- H.E. David Usupashvili, Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia
20 May 2015
- H.E. Michael Roth, Minister of State for Europe at the Federal Foreign Office
30 May 2015
- H.E. Mr Hashim Thaçi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo
1 June 2015





- Mr. Guo Jinlong, Member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Communist Party Secretary of Beijing Municipal Committee of China
17 June 2015
- Hon. Stephen Mayor, Member of the German Parliament and spokesperson for Home Affairs of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group
23 June 2015
- H.E. Henryka Mościcka-Dendys, Undersecretary of State for Parliamentary Affairs, European Policy and Human Rights in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Poland
26 June 2015
- H.E. Dr. Michael Linhart, Secretary General at the Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria
1 July 2015
- H.E. Dr. Sergio Mattarella, President of Italy
22 July 2015
- H.E. Mr. Gilbert Saboya Sunyé, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Principality of Andorra
23 July 2015



F.D. GREGORIUS CARAFA ARAGONIS ET HISPANICIS ROCELLA
MAGNI HISPANOLUNEDANI ORDINIS MAGISTER
CUI VIVERE VITA DEFUNCTI DE NOTIS ERAT
CUM SIBI IN PARSU MORTIS DECEDESSE
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The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation
St John's Co-Cathedral
St John Street
Valletta VLT1156 · Malta