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SAINT LAZARUS©

The Military & Hospitaller Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem

The International Newsletter

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The Grand Master Emeritus
His Excellency Francisco de Paula Enrique de Borbon y Escasany, 5th Duke of Seville, Grandee of Spain and late 48th Grand Master of the Order of Saint Lazarus

16 November 1943 — 20 May 2025

Requiescat in pace

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The church of St Lazarus, Pavia

Our occasional series focusing on leprosaria connected to the Order continues with a visit to Italy. We are grateful to the Grand Bailiwick of Sicily for sharing this information.

The Romanesque church of San Lazzaro is located on the eastern outskirts of Pavia, south of Milan. Built in the 12th century along the Via Francigena, it had a hospital dedicated to the care of pilgrims and lepers, and was intended to assist pilgrims in transit to or from Rome.

In 1216 the Bishop of Pavia, Fulco Scotti, dictated the rules of the hospital, and a pastoral visit of 1460 testified that the hospital had only four beds, two of which housed lepers. During the siege and subsequent battle of Pavia in 1525, the complex was occupied by the troops of François I, King of France, and suffered much damage.

In 1565 the hospital was elevated by Pope Pius IV to become the Commandery of the Order of St Lazarus. The first commander was Giuseppe Salimbene, whose family had been the patrons of the institution since its earliest days. He held this position until his death in 1603.

In 1572, the order in Italy was united with that of St Maurice, giving rise to the Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus. In France, however, the Order continued its autonomous life under the protection of the French crown. Shortly afterwards, the church was made a parish, but in 1581, Bishop Ippolito de' Rossi had the parish suppressed and reunited it with the parish of San Pietro in Verzolo, on which it still depends today.

The church was the original setting for the triptych of St. Lazarus, a work closely linked to the historical events of the Hospital of St. Lazarus in Pavia and to the Salimbene family, which has been in the Civic Museum collections since 1912. In the centre of the triptych is the Madonna and Child with Blessed Martin Salimbene; the bishop saint can be identified as St. Lazarus, while St. Maurice can be recognised in the soldier. The Pietà is set in the cymatium at the top of the triptych.

The insignia of the two military orders (white jewelled cross for the Knights of St. Maurice, green octagonal cross for the Order of St. Lazarus) are depicted, clearly visible, on the breastplate of the warrior's armour and on the bishop's tunic, gloves and missal.

From the Editor

In our 21st century world, continuity and consistency are qualities which are often in short supply. We tend to jump from one band wagon to another as the current fad takes us.

Yet, over the past 975 years, the Order of St Lazarus has had three consistent priorities – protecting our Christian heritage and standing up for our faith, alleviating the suffering of those suffering from leprosy (or Hansen's Disease) and caring for our community. While we no longer fight to defend the Holy Land, we continue 'Christ's faithful soldiers and servants' throughout our lives. We integrate our values into our local Christian communities through our engagement with them and involvement in them.

Despite all the political and social changes over the past nine centuries, these priorities remain central to the Order and its work and influence. We continue to support those with leprosy by providing the appropriate drugs to stop the disease in its tracks and, working through appropriate external aid organisations, to alleviate their suffering in hospitals and clinics before they can return to their families and communities. Additionally, we support them through our donations to help them become economic contributors within their local communities and to support their immediate and wider families.

Nearer home, we involve ourselves in our local communities by helping those who need assistance in a variety of ways and by recognising those who do so on a regular basis. The Global Challenge initiative being undertaken by the IPRCC aims to acknowledge some of this work; most of which happens 'under the radar', as it should. The 'Small Acts of Kindness' initiative of the GP Canada exemplifies this and, uniquely, recognises individual helpers and those whom we have assisted directly by giving them a small badge as a memento of the Order and its commitment to caring for others.

The French sum this up concisely – '*plus ça change; plus c'est la même chose*' – the more things change, the more they stay the same. Often it is said in a negative context; but, there is a positive interpretation to it. While the world changes the challenges remain the same and, for our Order, this is particularly pertinent as it is our enduring strength.

Norman Hunter Rose KCLJ, GCMLJ

Chair IPRCC & Deputy Grand Information Officer

The importance of tradition—a reflection

It is not fanciful to speculate that Dublin's famous 'Crusader' may have rubbed shoulders with some of the founders of the Order of St Lazarus. His mummified remains rested in the vault of St Michan's Church for over 800 years.

The mummies of St Michan's

The 'Crusader' must have been an impressive man. His remains stood at almost 2m (6ft 5ins). The limestone walls of the crypt and the atmosphere within it helped preserve his remains for centuries until they were sadly and shockingly destroyed in a mindless act of vandalism in 2024. Still, his spirit may linger.

In a country which has had its share of religious division, the Order stands out, as it is constituted on an ecumenical basis and remains the very definition of that unifying tradition to this day. It is encouraging to note how the Irish Priory continues to play its role as part of a vibrant international union that in the past has raised funds for such a wide variety of charities; it continues to do so in the present, with every indication that it will remain steadfast in the future.

In modern times, the Order in Ireland, which is run on an entirely voluntary basis – without a single paid employee - has reached out a co-operative hand to a variety of groups and organisations performing admirable charitable work at home and abroad. These include the provision of medical assistance and expertise to the disadvantaged in the area of skin diseases and other spheres of need, the care of the socially disadvantaged and other modes of alleviation of suffering.

The Order has adapted to and remains highly relevant to 21st century concerns and needs, employing social media platforms that would boggle the mind of the original founders of the Order who set it up during the Second Crusade. One suspects they would be very proud of what they set in motion. Perhaps the spirit of the Crusader at St. Michan's was one of them and is keeping a benevolent eye on us still.

For me, I hope that the spiritual guidance I provide is of assistance to those involved in the good works of the Order.

Dr William Morton

Dean, St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin

April celebrations

The Grand Priory of Portugal

Saturday 5 April 2025 was an important occasion in the history of the Order of St Lazarus – the re-establishment of the Grand Priory of Portugal.

The formal ceremony of appointment of the new Grand Prior and his government took place, fittingly, at the Chapel of St Lazarus in Tavira, presided over by the Grand Master, and was followed by a gala lunch.

Grand Hospitaller of the Order, HE the Chev. Charles Savona-Ventura, observed:

'It is encouraging to see a jurisdiction rise from the ashes. Portugal was one of the early jurisdictions set up in the 1930s'.

We look forward to the centenary celebrations in 2033!

The Grand Priory of Finland

Later the same month, on 26 April, the Grand Priory of Finland celebrated its 50th anniversary in Turku with a distinguished gathering of over 100 participants. Turku holds special significance for the Grand Priory as its spiritual home, being the location of the first investiture and ecumenical service in 1975.

Guests including the Grand Master and the Grand Referendary attended an ecumenical service in Turku Cathedral, at which the preacher was Archbishop Tapio Luoma, before a celebratory dinner at the Turku Volunteer Fire Brigade House.

In her welcome address, Grand Prior Helena Pesola reminded attendees that continuous development of our activities is key to the vitality of our Order in the years to come. Our mission remains necessary, and our strong values and sense of community guide us in continuing our work amidst the challenges of the world.

Special donations in this Jubilee year have focused especially on aid for Ukrainian children, as well as ongoing support for the Ghandhjii Seva Nikitan leprosy hospital in India.

Diary 2025-26

2025			
25 – 27 July	GB of Germany	Vigil & Investiture	Gotha, Germany
19-21 September	GP of Sweden	Vigil & Investiture	Bäckaskog Castle, Kristianstad, Scania, Sweden
10 - 11 October	GB of The Netherlands & P of Belgium	Vigil & Investiture	The Hague, Netherlands
10 - 12 October	GB of the Czech Republic & GP of Slovakia	Investiture	Church of the Resurrection, Slavkov u Brna, Czech Republic
17 – 18 October	GP of England & Wales	Investiture	London, UK
17 – 18 October	GP in Canada	Vigil & Investiture	Toronto, Canada
26 October	GP of France	Investiture	Alsace, France
30 October – 2 November	GP of America	Grand Prioral Council, Vigil & Investiture	San Antonio, Texas, USA
14 -15 November	Grand Magistral Council	Meetings	Madrid, Spain
28 - 29 November	GP of Ireland	Vigil & Investiture	TBA
5 - 6 December	GP of Greece	Vigil, Investiture & Dinner	Athens, Greece
2026			
16 – 19 April	GP of England & Wales	Pilgrimage & Investiture	Walsingham, Norfolk, UK
7 – 10 May	GP of Australia	Vigil & Investiture	Perth, Western Australia
14 – 17 May	GB of Germany	Vigil & Investiture/ Installation	Düsseldorf, Germany
25 – 28 June	GP in Canada	Chapter-General	Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Full details of all these and other forthcoming and recent events can be found on the international website. You can also find information about events and activities around the world on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/groups/st.lazarus

Items for inclusion in the diary should be sent to the Vice-Grand Chancellor (Administration) at bennisonpm@gmail.com