

The English-speaking Catholic Community in Gozo.

A short history: relying very much on memories....

The English Speaking Catholic Community has been in existence since the 1960s when Bishop Joseph Pace appointed *Canon Fortunato Cini* (in the black Volkswagen!) to be Chaplain and the Sunday Mass was celebrated at the Chapel in Ghajnsielem on the site where the Gozo Printing Press now stands.

The Community then moved to Lourdes Home, also in Ghajnsielem; it took an active interest in helping the Rose Society, which helped to sponsor the orphans (at that time there were many more than today).

On 9 April 1972 the Mass was moved to the Salesian Sisters in Racecourse (now Republic) Street, Victoria, because Victoria was more central. The Salesian sisters trained the boys as altar servers, prepared children for First Holy Communion and Confirmation and also organised the singing. Canon Cini retired in 1974 and died in April 1993.

Canon Achille Cauchi took over as Chaplain in 1974 and took the Community to the Bishop's Conservatory Chapel (on the first floor), where there were more parking spaces for cars. A number of sisters helped with the singing and also with the preparation for First Holy Communion and kept the altar boys in line! Canon Achille also invited the Community once a year to the San Dimitri Chapel for Mass in English on that Feast Day.

Fr. Joseph Galea S.J. celebrated Mass in English on Fridays in 1977, initially at St James Church in it-Tokk (now Independence Square), Victoria, and then at the Franciscan Sisters in Palm Street. In 1977 he also began celebrating Christmas Eve Midnight Mass in the Hall at Manresa Retreat House until 1979 when he went to the Missions. Fr. Charles Caruana S.J. took over the Friday Mass and celebrated it at the Seminary where he was Rector and where it continued until Fr. Galea returned in 1988. Father Galea also organised Lenten talks and study/discussion groups in 1977, which were continued by the rectors of the Seminary.

Fr. Gabriel Micallef OFM took over in 1984 until he was posted to Malta in 1988. He introduced the Visiting of the Seven Churches by the Community in Holy Week.

When *Fr. Mario Cassar* was appointed in 1988 the Mass was moved to the Sacred Heart Seminary in Victoria (our present location) to make it easier for senior citizens to attend Mass as the Chapel is on the ground floor. Fr. Mario started Holy Week services and restarted the Midnight Mass at Christmas. He also started coffee after Mass on the first Sunday of the month. A roster of readers was started and the singing was organised. In 1990 Father Joseph Galea S.J formed a weekly prayer group. Father Victor DeGabriele S.J is now looking after this small group.

Fr. Joseph Camilleri was appointed Chaplain in 1991. He introduced the first Community Council in 1992 and he also encouraged Community social activities. An

English-speaking branch of the Legion of Mary was started. The first Day Retreat was organised in October 1992, and the Community library was started.

Father Joseph Galea S.J. and Father Godfrey Micallef O.F.M. looked after the Community from January 1994 while Father Camilleri was experiencing Mission work in Guatemala.

Fr. Anthony Zammit was appointed Chaplain in June 1996 when it became obvious that Fr. Camilleri would not be resuming his responsibilities in Gozo. Fr. Zammit trained our altar servers; he continued weekly talks during Lent, developed further the newsletter, ensured greater involvement of children in the Mass and dedicated the Community to **St Thomas More**. He also introduced coffee after Mass each Sunday and created a social committee to improve the Community spirit. Its function was later taken over by the Council.

In November 2000, Bishop Cauchi agreed to appoint *Canon Joseph Borg*, *Canon George Debrincat*, *Father Emmanuel Magro* and *Father Anthony Refalo* to serve the community on a roster basis; *Father Manny Camilleri* was also co-opted.

Our present Chaplains have enriched the Community in many ways, particularly by being good pastors and communicators; their excellent homilies are greatly appreciated by the whole congregation. Each Priest has demonstrated a special charisma, which has endeared him to the Community.

- Canon Joseph Borg has helped with visiting our sick and dying.
- Canon George Debrincat has organised a mini course on our faith and also an R.C.I.A. course.
- Father Emmanuel Camilleri has given us courses to help the Lectors improve their skills.
- Father Emmanuel Magro started a Wednesday Mass at the Seminary. He has given thought provoking talks and directed one of our retreats.
- Father Anthony Refalo has advised us on Church matters and Canon Law.

We are grateful to the Jesuit Community at Manresa who hosts us on Thursdays for our Prayer Group, Fridays for Mass, First Monday of the month for our Council meetings and, often, both host and direct our bi-annual Day Retreats. Father Paul Zammit S.J. has always made us feel welcome

We also are grateful to The Rector of the Seminary and the community of Nuns who allow us to use the premises and provided us with a cupboard in the Sacristy to keep the vestments and altar vessels. They also provide us with the Advent Wreath, Easter Candle and various other items necessary for our Services.

Altar Servers: The following have acted as Altar Servers over the years: Dennis and Robert Grech; Ian, David, Michael, Peter and Paul Pace; Mark Vassallo; Karin and Christopher Bicker; Michael Mizzi. Bella Geraghty and Hollie Vella. Various members of the congregation will be remembered for "standing in" when the altar boys/girls were absent. Hans Carteledge, Terry Quadling, George Said and David Felice Pace are notable examples.

Eucharistic Ministers: Betty Walker, Eric Borg and Frank Totill up to 2004.

The Council decided to request the priest celebrating Mass on Sundays to take Communion to any sick person as it was felt that those unable to get to Mass may want to speak to a priest, receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and/ or the Sacrament of the Sick. The Chaplains agreed to this in principle. Parish Priests from Zebbug and San Lawrenz have also offered to take Communion to the sick in their Parish.

Sacristan duties have been carried out by: Lawrence Mizzi (who also animated the Mass and installed the P.A. System), Michael Azzopardi, Maggie Pearce, Eric Borg, Terry Quadling, Denis Daly, Michael Byrne and Audrey Pace.

The Community installed fans and a Public Address system in the Chapel, started a library, bought hymn books and also purchased Altar Servers outfits, Albs, Chasubles and Altar Vessels including the Sacramentary and Lectionaries for Manresa. In addition the Community installed an air-conditioner in the Chapel.

The Library bookcase was kindly donated by Camelo and Maria Buttigieg. The Sacramentary and lectionaries donated by the Rock family. Stephen and Jacque Vassallo donated the hand bells. The Chalice and Paten were donated anonymously.

A weekly newsletter has been published since 1990: Joseph Vella pioneered it; Fr. Joseph Camilleri, Terry Quadling, Stephen Vassallo, George Lajcek, Gilbert Turner and Valerie Turner continued it; and since 1996, Audrey and John Pace are currently producing it.

Council Chairpersons have been so far: 1992-19993 Alfred Walker; 1993-1994 Rupert Brook and John Grech; 1994-1995 Stephen Vassallo; 1995-1996 Roy Fleming September 1996 February 1999 Fr. Anthony Zammit; 1999- October 2004 Roy Fleming and since October 2004, alternating members of the Council have chaired the monthly meetings.

Special Happy Events:

The following persons have been received into the Church:

Winifred Harcourt (1977), Alfred Walker and Betty Walker(1991), Beatrice Azzopardi (1993), Maggie Pearce (1995), Emma Jones (1999), Hilary and Graham Hodgkinson (2001), Wendy Goodyear1 (2002), Beryl Thacker (2003). and Joan Finnie (2004).

Baptisms: Edward Pace, Emily Geraghty, Jonah Camilleri and Emma Grech.

First Holy Communion: About 20 children over the years.

Confirmation: Winifred Harcourt, Rachel Gibson, Beryl Thacker and Joan Finnie

The Community now have the following services:

- Mass in English every Wednesday, Friday, Sunday at 10 a.m.
- Mass on Holy Days of Obligation
- Mass on the feast of St Thomas More
- Holy Week Services
- Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve
- A day Retreat twice a year during Advent and Lent.

We organise *social events*, which include an Easter and Christmas lunch with our Chaplains, and also a “pot luck” supper on the feast of St Thomas More. Walks Barbecues, picnics and boat trips round the islands and to Comino; also a joint outing to St Paul’s Island with the English Catholic Community in Malta and visits to places of interest, including bird sanctuaries both on Comino and Malta.

The Community consists of a varied, transient group made up of retired expatriates, returning emigrants, Gozitans married to foreigners with young children, tourists and non -resident regular visitors, the English language and Catholicism being the common denominator. Our numbers vary according to the holiday season, down to about 45 regulars in winter but reaching 100 in the height of the summer season.

*(This is a summary of the history written in the **Millennium Booklet** with relevant updates.)*