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Hospitaller's Report

2006

I was invited to assume the role of Hospitaller to the Grand Priory of the Maltese Islands in January 2006. The Constitution of the Order entrenches hospitaller activities as the *raison d'être* of the Order's existence. With this brief in mind, my efforts for 2006 revolved around restructuring the socio-medical activities of the Grand Priory.

1. **Situation Health Report:** The socio-medical activities of the Grand Priory prior to its re-organisation in 2004 gravitated mainly towards improving the circumstances of victims of leprosy in Malta and overseas. The organisational turmoil of 2004 resulted in a major change of direction being assumed by the Grand Priory which chose to adopt and furnish support to two volunteer bodies – The Special Rescue Group which deals with first aid training and support, and the Step-by-Step Foundation which deals with the management of children with special needs. To further investigate the field of possible further activities in the socio-medical field, a situation report on the Health Situation of the Maltese Islands was prepared and presented to the Council of the Grand Priory. The report entitled *Proposal for a Socio-Medical Programme for the Grand Priory of the Maltese Islands* identifies various areas where the Grand Priory with its limited financial and human resources can contribute.
2. **Victims of Leprosy:** The care of lepers constituted the original medieval function of the Order's members. However, medical advances have resulted in the disease becoming extinct locally with no new cases of the infection being reported to the Health Authorities in the 2000s and the closure of Hal Ferha Leprosarium. Any significant work in the field of leprosy must be directed to overseas centres, a vision that must be at present restricted until the Grand Priory expands its financial resources. However, rather than completely exclude the traditional role completely from the Grand Priory's agenda, a number of minor activities were organised to continually remind the members of their assumed responsibility towards the victims of this disease.
 - a. A socio-cultural event which included a historical lecture entitled "*Kings, Knights and Lepers*" delivered by the Hospitaller followed by an informal dinner was organised to commemorate World Leprosy Day at the Coastline Hotel on 28th January 2006. It has been proposed at Council level that this event should become an annual one to serve as a reminder to the Grand Priory's members of the Order's original brief. There was also a short letter published in the *Sunday Times* which reminded readers of Dr. Ruzar Briffa's contribution towards leprosy.

- b. The Grand Priory has also established contact with the Raoul Follereau Foundation and has become a supporting member of this organisation. It is hoped that these links will lead to further future collaboration for the benefit of leprosy victims.
 - c. The Grand Priory has also responded to an appeal for used stamps made by the British organisation Lepira which supports several international initiatives to combat the disease. During 2006, the Grand Priory forwarded a total of 460 gm weight of used stamps collected by various members of the Grand Priory following an appeal made in the June newsletter of the Grand Priory.
3. **The Elderly:** A major socio-medical problem facing most of the developed world, including Malta, is the increasing proportion of the aged population. This important section of society is faced with specific problems, included that of loneliness and a feeling of abandonment from their families. The Grand Priory has during 2006 organised a social visit to the elderly housed at St. Catherine of Sienna Home for the Elderly at Attard on the occasion of St. Lazarus Day on the 17th June 2006. During this activity, the inmates were given a small gift. However the most appreciated “gift” was the time and company given by the members of the Grand Priory to the inmates.
 4. **Assistance to the Malta Diabetes Association:** The Grand Priory was asked by the MDA whether it would assist the association to run the Summer Camp for 60 youths suffering from diabetes mellitus. The Grand Priory forwarded this request to the attention of the Special Rescue Group – St. Lazarus Corps whose members joined the activity contributing towards the surveillance of these children. The contribution given by the SRG-SLC members was very well received by the MDA and will hopefully become a regular annual feature of the SRG-SLC activities.
 5. **Red Cross Appeal for refugees:** The Grand Priory received a request from the Red Cross for the donation of items aimed at helping the refugees presently housed at Hal Far. A request was made and a volume of new clothes items were been donated by the members of the Grand Priory.
 6. **Expansion of volunteer services:** The Special Rescue Group – St. Lazarus Corps and Step-by-Step Foundation have continued to offer their volunteer services in various localities. The Grand Priory has assisted the expansion of these services by helping establish links with the Local Councils at San Gwann, Malta and Gharb, Gozo.
 7. **Food hygiene courses:** These were organised on the initiative of the Almoner at various localities. These courses are offered at a nominal fee of Lm2.00 which goes towards supplementing the Charity Fund of the Grand Priory.
 8. **International Profile:** The Hospitaller section of the Grand Priory had initiated discussions with the International Green Cross of the Order with the aim of helping to co-ordinate the International Hospitaller Activities of the Order. The section also had talks with an editor of diplomatic news at the Vatican who during his visit to Malta was escorted to the Step-by-Step Foundation’s clinic at Hamrun, Malta.
 9. **Donations to the Special Rescue Group – St. Lazarus Corps.** The Commandery of Gozo donated an ambulance to the SRG-SLC on the occasion of the International Investiture and Supreme Council Meeting for which was obtained through benefactors. The Grand Priory also donated the financial sum of Lm120 to help purchase an emergency kit for use by the Corps.

Other socio-medical activities were discussed during the Council Meetings. These had to be shelved either because of [1] restriction in available funds and/or [2] a limitation of human resources. Regretfully, it must be observed that participation in both fund-raising activities and in medico-social events is limited to the same few individuals. Admittance to the Grand Priory should be accompanied by a commitment to fully participate in all its activities.