



HOSPITALLERS

Order of Malta International Strategic Planning Conference: Venice, Italy

January 15–18, 2009



*Des McCarthy and
Jim O'Connor*

Tony Macken, President of the Australian Association of the Order, prepared an excellent summary of the content and results of the Order's Strategic Planning Conference held in Venice, Italy, in January 2009. With Tony's permission, Dan Kelly edited his paper to incorporate information regarding the American Association's participation at the conference. The edited version follows:

The Conference

Every five years, the Chapter General of the Order elects the members of the Sovereign Council (other than the Grand Master who holds office for life) to govern the Order for the next five years.

In the year in which an election is due — 2009 is one such year — the Order arranges a conference to formulate policy and organizational recommendations for consideration by the Sovereign Council. The theme of the 2009 Conference was "Ten Years Ahead." All Priors, Regents, Presidents, and Ambassadors were invited to participate, as was each Association, represented by its Delegates and Professed Knights. Over 415 delegates from around the world attended the Conference.

American Association Participation

The American Association was represented by sixteen members including: in alphabetical order, Tom Carney, Fra' John Dunlap, Tom and Sarah Flood, Dan and Rosemary Kelly, Des and Pat McCarthy, Mary McCooney, Joe and Elissa Metz, Jim and Ann O'Connor, Jack Pohrer, and Bob and Ellen Shafer.

The accommodation for all was in the Hilton Morino Stucky Hotel, a very large structure on its own island, a 10-minute boat trip away from St. Mark's Square. This and the fog, icy rain and piercing cold meant that the delegates were not distracted from their consideration and sometimes searching debate of the topics assigned to the 12 working groups, to which all delegates were assigned.

The twelve working groups by topic were:

- 1. The revival of the First Class:** Attracting members and cultivating vocations: an examination of the state of the First Class and measures to encourage more members of the Order to consider becoming Knights of Justice ("Professed Knights"), especially younger members.
- 2. Fifty years of Obedience:** Assessing the Class of Obedience, Knights and Dames interested in deepening their spiritual and practical commitment to the Order who take the Promise of Obedience.
- 3. Developing Future Leadership for the governing structures of the Order:** Measures to assist in closing the gap between the increasing demands of the Order's structures and the availability of qualified people to serve as local, regional and international leaders.
- 4. The Order Providing and Spreading Christian Education:** Examining whether educational projects and activities should be a core competency of the Order in the near future.
- 5. "Put on the Armor of Light":** The Pope's Direct Appeal to the Order: What should be the Order's response to the direct call made to the Order by Pope Benedict XVI: "It is time to awaken from sleep! To put on the armor of Light to fight the evil and sin which darken our existence", linking this appeal to our mission in recognizing Christ in the needy whom we serve?
- 6. Promoting Christian Culture in the Secular World of the 21st Century:** How can individual members and the Order overall effectively work to build the City of God?

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Strategic Planning Conference in Venice

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7. **The Order: A Haven for the Sanctity of Life:** What is the Order's role in the titanic conflict between the "culture of life" and the "culture of death" in which secularism now boldly attacks Christian communities and their values and their right to act or speak on a multitude of issues?
8. **Obsequium Pauperum: Focus on the Social and Spiritual Victims of Modern Society:** Do we need to focus on new areas of social distress, loneliness, poverty and outcast situations which can be addressed by willing volunteers not possessed of professional training required for classic hospitaller projects?
9. **Originating from Many Traditions, Our Need to Join in a Single Culture of the Order:** Recommendations as to how individual members and organizations of the Order can be led to genuinely feel part of the one Order with all other members and volunteers worldwide.
10. **Enhancing Highlights in the Life of the Order:** International Pilgrimages: Measures to maintain, cultivate and develop the annual pilgrimage to Lourdes and other pilgrimages to The Holy Land, Rome, Malta, the International Summer Camp, the Youth Camp in Lebanon and international participation in national Association-sponsored pilgrimages in Germany, Italy, France, Spain and England.
11. **The Order as Promoter of Peace among Nations, Religions and Societies:** As a Sovereign institution involved in charitable work world-wide and as a neutral organization not involved in political activity, the Order is uniquely suited to promote peace in the world — including the Middle East.
12. **Presenting the Order as an Organization Worthy of Financial Support from Within and Beyond its Membership:** Does each Knight and Dame see the Order as their highest priority for contributing time, talent and money to our local and international activities? Externally, the Order is seen as a good cause, honest, transparent and efficiently devoted to its tasks: How do we maintain this image and adapt it to future demands?

The Workings of the Conference

Each Working Group contained a mix of Ambassadors, Priors, Regents, Presidents, Delegates of National Associations, Professed Knights, members of the Sovereign Council, members of the Committees of the Order and full-time employees. HMEH the Prince and Grand Master briefly attended each Working Group.

On Sunday, January 18th, the delegates met in final Plenary Session to hear summaries and reports from the two Moderators of each Working Group and to be addressed by the Chairman of the Organizing Team, Winfried Henckel von Donnersmarck, a member of the Sovereign Council and by the Grand Master.

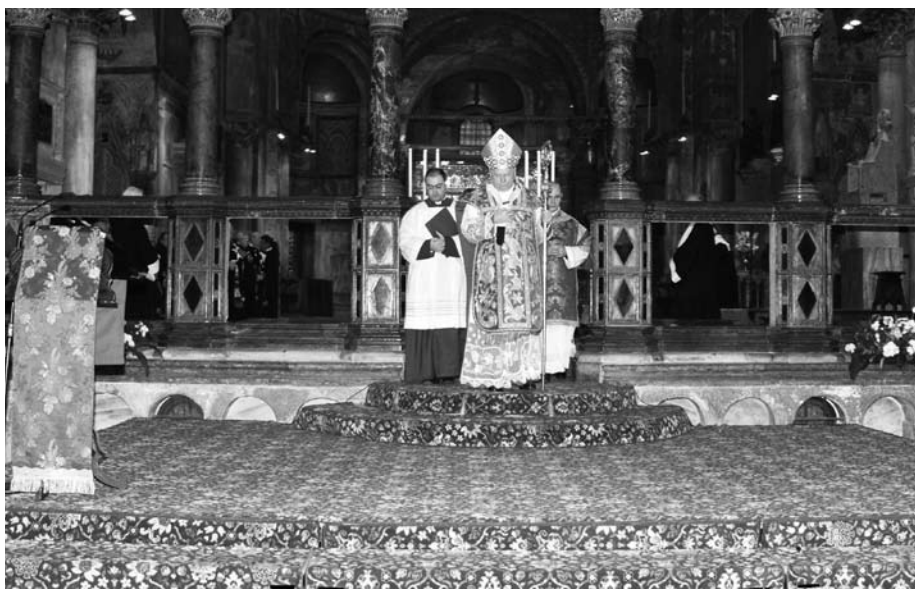
The twelve reports, each condensed into 5 minutes, will deservedly be a permanent part of the patrimony of the Order and a resource for members of each Priory, Sub-priory and Association: The past, present, and future of the Order came under review and the recommendations of each Working Group were the product of the experience, reflection, practical wisdom, enthusiasm and goodwill of the participants, and were warmly received by all.

Religious Ceremonies

In addition to the Mass of the Holy Spirit, celebrated before each day's work began on the 16th and 17th, there was a Mass celebrated by the Patriarch of Venice in the Basilica of St Mark. Delegates processed in church robes into the Basilica; the procession and attendant ceremony were moving and impressive, even an attraction to the tourists present in St. Mark's Square.

Meeting of Presidents

After the formal closure of the Conference, the Presidents of the 47 National Associations met under the Chairmanship of the Dean of Presidents, HE Erich Prinz von Lobkowitz. The agenda included a power point presentation by the Receiver of the Common Treasure, HE Gian Luca Chiavari on the finances of the Order, the election of the 15 Presidents to be electors at the Chapter General in June, and



Mass at the Basilica of Saint Mark

discussion of some policy issues, including accepting the work of the International Association of Catholic Bioethicists (IACB) as a work of the Order itself, a proposal which was supported.

The three Presidents of the U.S. Associations: Noreen Falcone (Federal), Dan Kelly (American), and Bill Regan (Western) were elected along with 12 others, including the Presidents of Australia, Britain, France, and Germany, to comprise the Presidents' component of the Chapter General which is to elect the members of the new Sovereign Council in June. The American Association will also be represented by Fra' John Dunlap, Regent of the Sub-Priory of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Conclusions of the Conference

Although the findings of the Conference are yet to be digested, some conclusions already seem clear:

- Absolute priority is to be given by the world-wide Order and each National Association including the American Association to the recruitment and encouragement of candidates prepared to put themselves forward for Profession as Knights of Justice. There is an expectation that each Association will produce members prepared to consider this noble and rewarding vocation, whether they are widowers or younger men considering the choice of a state of life.
- A house of formation/retreat centre will ultimately be established in Rome, but this will be supplemented by "Virtual Retreats" and a "Virtual Seminary" so that the spiritual and intellectual formation of members trying out for a vocation can be assisted even while they continue their normal studies or jobs.
- The war of the secularists on religious belief and practices will intensify and the Order of Malta may have a critically important role to play in resisting legislation and propaganda attacking traditional marriage, or promoting abortion and euthanasia or the harvesting of embryos. This campaign will seek to deny men and women of faith the right to act or speak on their beliefs: The Catholic community risks demoralization and division as these attacks intensify, often seemingly without effective resistance, despite the work of individual lion-hearted members of the Episcopate and Chaplaincy and of institutions such as the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and the Family.
- In that context, the work of the International Association of Catholic Bioethicists (IACB) which was sponsored into being by the Order of Malta at the Malta Seminar in 2004 is proposed to be elevated into a core competency of the Order of Malta.
- The continued growth in membership numbers of the National Associations is to be encouraged, especially among those Associations (the American Association is not one), whose membership has stalled or declined.



Tom Carney and the Grand Master in Venice

The Order of Malta world-wide is in good condition, vibrant, and very confident of addressing the very real challenges and opportunities identified for us by the Venice Strategy Conference 2009: The American Association can be very proud of the delegates who represented us in Venice, and, on behalf of the American Association, I thank each and all of them for their work on our behalf.

Daniel J. Kelly, KMOB
President, American Association, SMOM

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