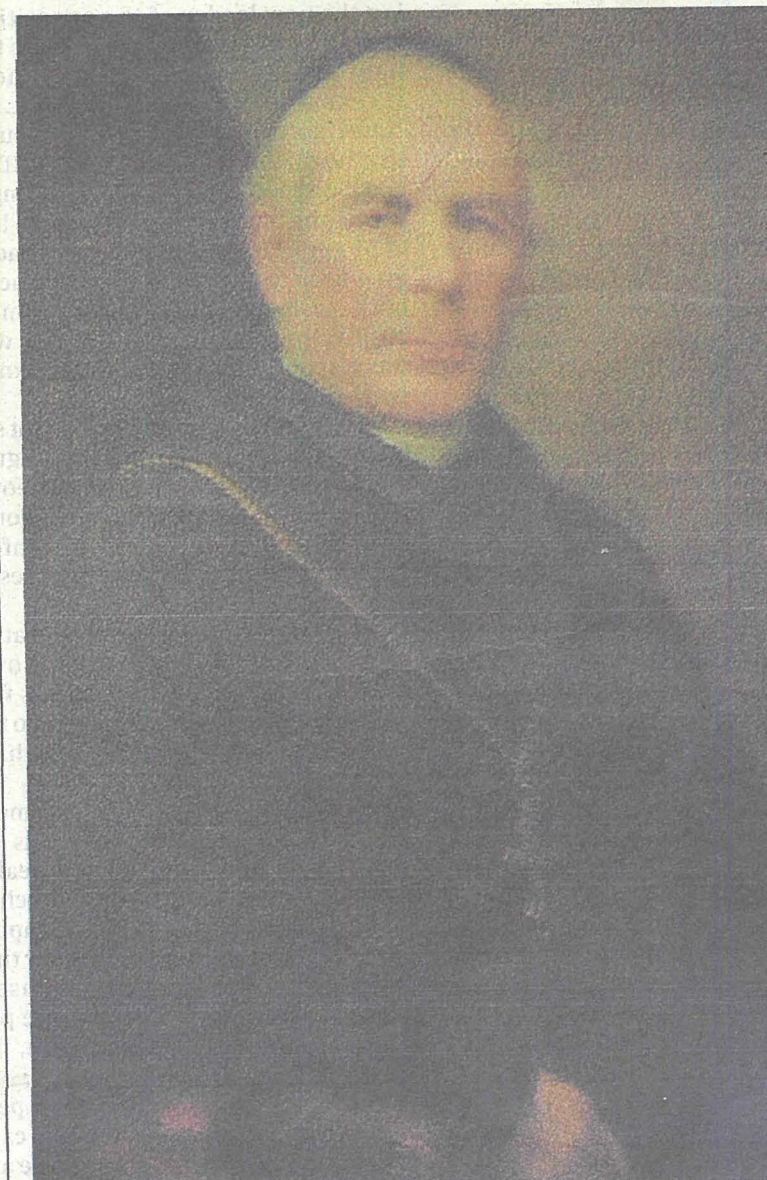


LIFE AND WELLBEING HISTORY

IT HAPPENED IN OCTOBER



Bishop Michele Francesco Buttigieg, the first bishop of the diocese of Gozo, created in 1864. PHOTO: THE CATHEDRAL MUSEUM, GOZO



Bishop Archbishop of Malta Mgr Gaetano Pace Forno, OSA, a Gozitan who initially opposed the dismemberment of Gozo from his diocese.

Birth of the Gozo diocese in 1864

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On September 22, 1864, it was officially announced in the newspaper *Giornale di Roma* that Gozo had been created into a separate diocese. By the next day, the news had reached the Maltese islands and had spread far and wide. Many Gozitans could hardly believe their ears, even though they had patiently worked towards this end throughout the 19th century.

On March 16, 1863, Mgr Michele Francesco Buttigieg had been created titular Bishop of Lite in Macedonia and Auxiliary to the Bishop Archbishop of Malta, Mgr Gaetano Pace-Forno OSA, an Augustinian who was also a Gozitan. Mgr Buttigieg was consecrated bishop on the following May 3 and then made his solemn entry in Gozo, where he was to reside, on June 14. This same Bishop Buttigieg was now chosen to be the first bishop of the new Gozo diocese.

On September 24, 1864, the Collegiate Chapter of the Gozo Matrice proceeded in procession to Bishop Buttigieg's residence to tender its formal congratulations. Impromptu festivities, including the playing of band marches, the pealing of bells and the firing of mortars, continued throughout the day. But the installation of the new Cathedral Chapter and the new bishop's solemn entry into the Cathedral, together with the relative festivities, took place between October 21 and 24, and this is the reason why this anniversary story is being published this month.

The Gozitans had long been working towards the goal of having a separate diocese but various factors – including the opposition of the Bishop Archbishop of Malta, the political

upheaval in Italy leading to its unification in 1861 and the small size of Gozo – had so far prevented their dream from becoming a reality.

But in 1864, Gozo was finally dismembered from the diocese of Malta, not least through the efforts of Rev. Pietro Pace (later to become the third Bishop of Gozo) and Crown Advocate Sir Adrian Dingli, a future Chief Justice of Malta, among others.

Actually, the first requests for the establishment of a Gozitan diocese had been made in 1798 and 1799 by Archpriest Rev. Saverio Cassar (who had led the island against the French in 1798) to King Ferdinand III of Sicily. A similar petition was presented to Pope Gregory XVI and King William IV of Great Britain in 1836, and it was followed by a third and fourth request to Pope Pius IX in 1855 and 1857, respectively.

In 1860, the latest Gozitan request was backed officially by the governor of Malta, Sir John Gaspard le Marchant.

A fifth petition, dated 1862, led to Mgr Buttigieg being created Auxiliary Bishop with instructions to reside in Gozo, as mentioned previously.

In February 1864, the Gozitans launched their sixth attempt for complete dismemberment, backed by the British government. After seeking the advice of Rev. Paolo Micallef OSA, the general of the Augustinians, Pope Pius IX finally conceded the establishment of the diocese of Gozo, which came into being by means of the papal bull *Singulari Amore*.

On September 16, 1864, the Consistorial decree *Pastoris Aeterni* detailed the rules to be generally followed to dismember a new diocese.

There had to be sufficient reason to erect a new diocese, including whether it would serve to further the divine cult. A See could only be erected in an important and suitable locality. Since the Gozo Citadel's Matrice was considered the mother of the

island's parishes, it was now destined to become the cathedral church of the new diocese. A third requisite included the proper endowment of the bishop, including his future residence, the chancery offices and the seminary.

The *Consensus Ordinarii*, or the permission of the incumbent bishop to allow the dismemberment of his diocese, was not binding upon the pope, while no difficulty was encountered regarding the consent of the civil authorities for two reasons: firstly, the Holy See had not officially recognised the right of the local government to present candidates for the local bishopric and, secondly, the British government was in favour of the dismemberment.

Pope Pius IX agreed with the above but he reduced the deduction of the Maltese bishop's *mensa* to about 16 per cent from £520 to £434. In fact, the most difficult hurdle had been the question of endowment.

The total Maltese local population numbered about 120,000, out of which about 20,000 Gozitans were about to be taken from the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Malta. The Consistorial Congregation therefore agreed to reduce the *mensa* by one-eighth, but the final word was left to the pope, who changed it as just mentioned. However, this sum could not be channelled to the Gozitan diocese before a vacancy occurred in Malta.

The *mensa* of the new diocese was made up of the Ta' Dbiegi benefice, a contribution by the Gozo Collegiate Chapter, the *me diadecima* tax and the Chancery dues. These were calculated to total about £162. They would rise to about £600 when the

detraction from the *mensa* of the bishop of Malta would be added in the future. In the meantime, the income of the new bishop was to be supplemented, temporarily, by the prebend of the Archpriest of St Mary's (the new cathedral) and various other promised contributions.

"In February 1864, the Gozitans launched their sixth attempt for complete dismemberment, backed by the British government. Pope Pius IX finally conceded"

Another difficulty was the provision of a seminary. It was suggested, and eventually accepted, that St Julian Hospital was suitable since it admitted only a few patients who could easily be accommodated at the more modern hospital situated across the street, while its pious legacies could be converted to other uses. Its conversion into a seminary was sanctioned in 1864.

The papal bull *Singulari Amore* was drafted by September 18, but it was predated by two days. Therefore, strictly speaking, September 16, 1864, is the official date of the establishment, or birthday, of the Gozo diocese. The papal bull nominating Mgr Buttigieg was probably ready by September 22.

All the documentation relating to the new diocese was

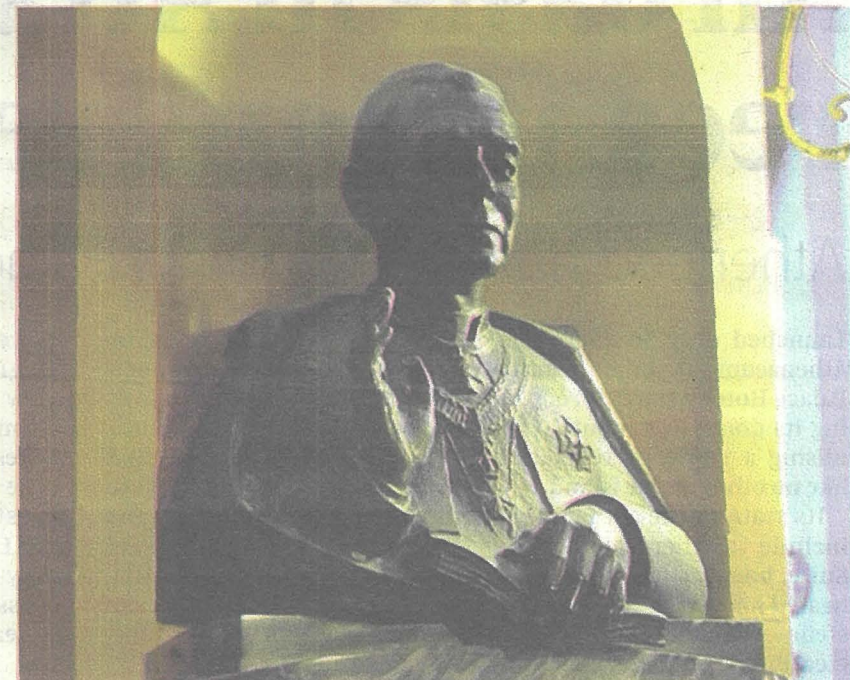
ready in Rome by October 8 and handed over to the Gozitan representatives, Canon Francesco Saverio Formosa and Rev. Paolo Camilleri. The dean of the Malta Cathedral Chapter, Canon Luigi Fernandez, was appointed Apostolic Delegate to execute the apostolic letters and he duly proceeded to Gozo on October 15.

During the following week, Fernandez and the Bishop-Elect Buttigieg visited all the parishes and met all the ecclesiastical and civil bodies of Gozo. On October 22, Mgr Buttigieg issued his first pastoral letter wherein he appealed for prayers and help. The government declared Saturday and Monday, October 22 and 24, to be public holidays. Mortar-firing, band-playing and bell-pealing on Sunday, October 23, ushered in the festivities.

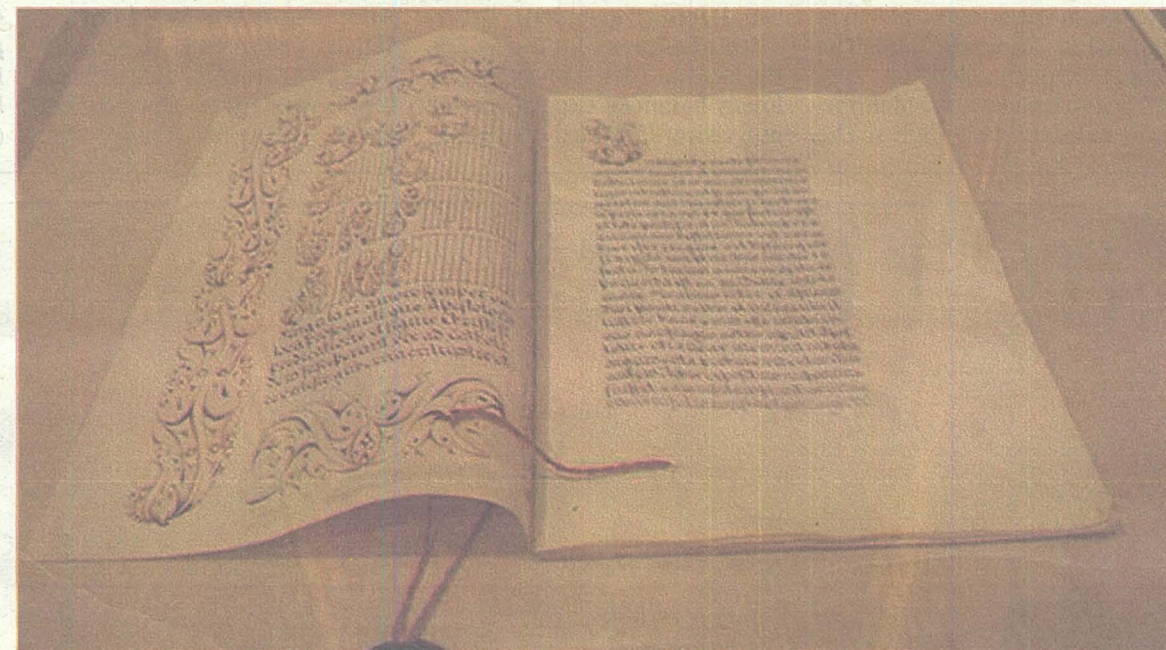
On October 22, the papal bull *Singulari Amore* was officially



Paul Camilleri's depiction of the request for the erection of the Gozo diocese being presented to Pope Pius IX. PHOTO: THE CATHEDRAL CHAPTER, GOZO



A bust of Gozo-born Rev. Pietro Pace at the Gozo Cathedral. He worked for the establishment of the Gozo diocese and was destined to be its third bishop. PHOTO: THE CATHEDRAL CHAPTER, GOZO



The papal bull *Singulari Amore* by which Gozo acquired its separate diocese in 1864. PHOTO: THE CATHEDRAL ARCHIVES, GOZO



A bust of Gozo-born Sir Adrian Dingli at The Mall Gardens, Floriana. He worked for the setting up of the Gozo diocese and was later appointed Chief Justice of Malta.



Paul Camilleri Cauchi's depiction of Bishop Buttigieg's solemn entry into the cathedral on October 22, 1864. PHOTO: THE CATHEDRAL CHAPTER, GOZO

handed over by Mgr Fernandez to the Chancellor of the new cathedral chapter who read it out to the congregation present at the newly-created cathedral. There was then the investiture of the 23 canons of the new cathedral chapter.

In the afternoon, there was the enthronement ceremony in which Canon Karl Antonio Bondi represented the new bishop to receive the homage of the newly-created cathedral chapter.

The next day, Sunday, October 23, 1864, saw the solemn entry of the new bishop. All the confraternities, friars of the mendicant orders and secular clergy proceeded outside the Citadel to meet the new bishop who arrived in an open carriage pulled by the people.

After a welcoming address by a 12-year-old cleric, Bishop Buttigieg mounted the then

customary white mare and proceeded to the cathedral under a canopy carried by six eminent Gozitan laymen behind a young boy carrying the papal bull on a silver platter. To the great cheers and applause of the great number of people present, the

new bishop made his solemn entry into the cathedral.

The next day was devoted to popular entertainment, including horse-racing, band-playing and illuminations.

A 66-year-long dream had finally come true.