

# International Day of Charity and its links to the Grand Priory of Australasia

## Background

The United Nations has implemented a number of initiatives aimed at securing “Global Solidarity to Eradicate Poverty”. This intention is at the core of its “2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development” which was adopted in September 2015. This key policy document recognises that an indispensable requirement for sustainable development in the World rests on eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty. The “Agenda” seeks a stronger international collaborative effort focussed on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable in our societies. These aims are entirely consistent with the objectives of the Sovereign Order of St John of Jerusalem, Knights Hospitaller.

In 2012 the UN General Assembly officially declared the 5<sup>th</sup> September as the special day for the world to come together to focus on eradicating all forms and dimensions of poverty. It has as its prime objective the sensitizing and mobilizing of people, NGOs, and stakeholders all around the world to help others through volunteer and philanthropic activities.

The date of 5<sup>th</sup> September was chosen to commemorate the anniversary of the passing of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 "for work undertaken in the struggle to overcome poverty and distress, which also constitute a threat to peace" (United Nations).<sup>1</sup>

## The Australian Link

In 1981, on visit to Australia, Mother Teresa was made an Honorary Member of the Sovereign Order of St John of Jerusalem, Knights Hospitaller. Her citation read:

Mother Therese

The Knights of the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Knights Hospitaller welcome you to Australia.

The Knights wish to state that they wholeheartedly endorse the principles you stand for, the great work already accomplished in charitable deeds, and that you will continue to possess good health so as to continue in the unique role God has assigned you.

Since his Royal Highness the Prince Grand Master, Prince Andrej of the Yugoslav House of Karageorgevich, brother of the late King Peter II, graciously expressed his interest in and approbation for your good works by inviting you to be an honorary member of the Order of Saint John, the Knights have been greatly honoured by your acceptance.

The Order was founded in charity and holds that – charity is the mother and foundation of all virtues. Today it functions as an international, ecumenical and charitable organisation.

Today we wish to offer a further demonstration that we practise the Christian ethic by offering you a donation of one thousand dollars to assist you to promote your international charitable works.

We thank you for honouring us with this opportunity and pray that there will be many more opportunities in the future.

H.E. Bailiff Dr Douglas Hodges G.C.S.J. Grand Prior

H.E. Bailiff Sir Hubert Opperman G.C.S.J. Prior

H.E. Bailiff Patrick Connor G.C.S.J. Prior

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<sup>1</sup> Mother Teresa passed away on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1997 at the age of 87 in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), India. She was canonized by Pope Francis I on 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2016.

Mother Teresa noted her appreciation with a hand written comment on the official citation document held by the Grand Priory of Australasia which reads:

“God Bless You  
M. Terese, MC<sup>2</sup>.<sup>3</sup>  
3/10/81”

From that date, the Grand Priory of Australia commenced to raise fund for her cause and this became an annual activity for many years.

Three years on, at the 1984 meeting of the Sovereign Council, the Australian Grand Priory’s proposal to adopt an International Project in aid of Mother Teresa was adopted. It was noted that: “this is the first time the Order has had a Project of an International Nature” (Ledwidge, 2004: 67).

### **Sources**

1. United Nations, “International Day of Charity - the United Nations” (<https://www.un.org › observances › charity-day>).
2. Ledwidge, J.M., 2004: “Knights to Remember: A Tribute to the Sovereign Order of St John of Jerusalem, Knights Hospitaller”, Joshua Books, Maroochydore, 235p.
3. “Holy See” website – <https://www.vatican.va> (visited 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 2023)

Chevalier Darryl Low Choy  
Queensland Priory  
2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023

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<sup>2</sup> The Missionaries of Charity

<sup>3</sup> The Holy See and other English speaking references use the English spelling of “Teresa” as opposed to the French/ European version which she used to sign her name or the version used by the Grand Priory of Australia in 1981.