

**An Alternate Version of
Events leading to the resignation of Fra' Matthew Festing
from the office of Grand Master
December 2016 - January 2017**

In order for participants in the Council Complete of State to have a complete picture of recent events in the government of the Sovereign Order of Malta, certain members of the Order have requested the publication of a more comprehensive Timeline. This information has been meticulously gathered over the past three months from many different sources.

6 December

Cardinal Burke presents The Grand Master with a letter from Pope Francis (*see Attachment 1*) dated 1 December, asking Cardinal Burke to collaborate with The Grand Master:

“Prego perciò Vostra Eminenza, in qualità di Cardinale Patrono, affinché, in collaborazione con il Principe Gran Maestro dell’Ordine, svolga a tal fine l’opportuna vigilanza, in esecuzione del suo compito di “promuovere gli interessi spirituali dell’Ordine e dei suoi membri ed i rapporti fra la Santa Sede e l’Ordine” (Carta costituzionale, Art. 4 par. 4).”

Translation:

“I therefore ask Your Eminence, as Cardinal Patronus, collaborating with the Prince and Grand Master of the Order, to ensure that you carry out your duty of “promoting the spiritual interests of the Order and its members and relations between the Holy See and the Order” (Constitutional Charter, Art. 4 par. 4).”

Pope Francis states his particular concern for the Order regarding the teaching of the Church:

“Andrà inoltre particolarmente curato che nelle iniziative e opera assistenziali dell’Ordine non vengano impiegati e diffusi metodi e mezzi contrari alla legge morale. Se in passato è sorto qualche problema in questo ambito, mi auguro che possa essere completamente risolto. Mi dispiacerebbe sinceramente, infatti, se alcuni alti Ufficiali – come Le stesso mi ha riferito – pur sapendo di queste prassi, concernenti soprattutto la distribuzione di contraccettivi di qualsiasi tipo, non siano finora intervenuti per porvi fine. Non dubito però che, seguendo il principio paolino di “operare la verità nella carità” (Ef. 4,15), si riuscirà a entrare in dialogo ed ottenere le necessarie rettifiche.”

Translation:

“Furthermore, the Order must ensure that the methods and means it uses in its initiatives and healthcare works are not contrary to the moral law. If in the past there has been a problem of this nature, I hope that it can be completely resolved. I would be very disappointed if – as you told me – some of the high Officers were aware of practices such as the distribution of any type of contraceptives and have not yet intervened to end such things. I have no doubts that by following the principle of Paul and “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4,15), the matter can be discussed with these Officers and the necessary rectification obtained.”

Cardinal Burke presented this letter with a cover letter (*see again Attachment 1*), in which His Eminence illustrated the gravity of the situation: “Given the seriousness of the matter, I ask your fullest cooperation, lest the Holy Father find it necessary to address directly his concerns through a visitation of the Order.”

The Grand Master brought this letter to the attention of the Sovereign Council who were meeting that day. In the afternoon, he invited the Grand Chancellor, along with the Grand Commander and the Cardinal Patron, into his office for a meeting. In the meeting, he told the Grand Chancellor that it was the express wish of the Holy See, as communicated to him by the Cardinal Patron, that those ultimately responsible for the Order's continued and concealed immoral practices should shoulder that responsibility. The Grand Chancellor refuses to do this. After a long discussion, eventually the Grand Master instructs the Grand Chancellor under the Promise of Obedience, in the presence of the Superior of Knights in Obedience and Pope Francis's representative to the Order, to resign. The Grand Chancellor again refuses.

It is worth mentioning that previously a Grand Chancellor was asked to resign under the Promise of Obedience. Carlo Marullo di Condojanni was asked by Servant of God Fra' Andrew Bertie, then Grand Master, to resign, which he dutifully did. This action was taken because the other High Charges (including the Grand Hospitaller at the time, Albrecht von Boeselager) implored Fra' Andrew to do this.

7 December

The Grand Master calls the members of the Sovereign Council together (aside from the Grand Chancellor) to discuss the event, reiterating that if the Grand Chancellor is not removed, the Cardinal Patron will instruct the Holy Father to initiate a visitation of the Order.

In accordance with the Constitutional Charter and Code of the Order, The Grand Master asks the Sovereign Council whether they will vote in favour of removing the Grand Chancellor with a two-thirds majority. It is apparent that two-thirds of the Sovereign Council will not agree to this.

In the evening, the events are reported to Cardinal Burke, who informs the Grand Master that the next morning one of three things will happen:

- 1) The Grand Chancellor will resign of his own accord.
- 2) The Grand Master will remove him from his office by suspending him from the Order through a disciplinary procedure, having broken the Promise of Obedience.
- 3) The Cardinal Patron will recommend to Pope Francis to initiate a visitation of the Order.

8 December

The Grand Master calls an emergency meeting of the Sovereign Council, and explains the situation, including these three choices. He again asks the Grand Chancellor to resign, and he again refuses. The Grand Commander then starts the disciplinary procedure against the Grand Chancellor, with the Magistral Decree countersigned by the Grand Master and Grand Commander.

[This decree is confirmed by the Grand Commander subsequent to his email of 12 December desiring to revoke his signature on the letter of 8 December. As a few (unqualified) individuals protested the legality of the procedure, the legal process of this Magistral Decree is confirmed on 9 January by the State Attorney; this appears in another Decree signed by the Grand Master and the Grand Chancellor Ad Interim, Fra' John Critien (*see Attachment 2*).]

12 December

The Secretary of State of the Holy See, Cardinal Parolin, writes a letter to the Grand Master expressing his disappointment at the "unpleasant and perilous turn taken by events" and emphasises, referring to the Holy Father's letter of 1 December, that "His Holiness asked that dialogue be the approach used to address and resolve potential problems. He never mentioned, conversely, expelling anyone."

13 December

The Grand Master issues a press release clarifying the situation following protests from some disgruntled members of the Order (*see Attachment 3*).

The Grand Master writes to Cardinal Parolin requesting a meeting to discuss his letter. The Grand Master and Cardinal Parolin meet twice (Cardinal Parolin meets with the Holy Father between these meetings) to discuss the event. It is agreed not to take any further action, and there is a discussion around potentially forming a Commission of Inquiry into the event to examine the procedure in terms of Canon and Melitensi Law – any eventual Commission would be made up of nominees from the Holy See and the Grand Magistracy.

14 December

The Sovereign Council elects a Grand Chancellor Ad Interim, Fra' John Critien.

21 December

Cardinal Parolin writes to the Grand Master announcing the formation of a Commission of Inquiry into the events, with a cover letter from Pope Francis. The Commission is made up of a Canon Lawyer, a former Grand Chancellor, the President of the Lebanese Association of the Order, a Papal Nuncio and a Member of the Swiss Association of the Order.

23 December

The Grand Master writes to Pope Francis, expressing his displeasure at the Commission formed by the Secretary of State. He points out that one of the members is a known Freemason, and three of them are involved in a very strange and mysterious fund in Geneva, operated by a lady who at the time was defendant of a legal case against her concerning her management of the fund. In addition, the Grand Master points out that the letter from the Cardinal Secretary of State is contrary to the agreement the Grand Master and he reached on 13 December. The Grand Master does not say that four of the five are known allies of the former Grand Chancellor, so the Commission could hardly claim to be objective, and that those involved with the fund are also known to Cardinal Parolin in this capacity (*see Attachment 4*).

The Order produces a Press Release in which it communicates the Order's reaction to the Commission as laid out by The Grand Master (*see Attachment 5*).

(Pope Francis did not respond to the aforementioned letter.)

4 January

In an email to the Procurator of the Grand Priory of Bohemia, copying in various officers of the Order worldwide, the Grand Chancellor Ad Interim clarifies to members of the Order their responsibilities regarding the Holy See's Commission of Inquiry. The answer given is that people could give testimony to the Commission, however their testimony should not be at odds with the decisions of the government of the Order:

“to provide testimony to the Commission instituted by the Secretariat of State is not feasible should its modality and its content expressing judgements result in being a direct or indirect objection against the decisions reached.”

10 January

The Order makes a statement underlining its rights and its sovereignty, and illustrates why the actions of the Holy See regarding the Commission of Inquiry are unacceptable as these are aimed at interfering with the internal governance of the Order (*see Attachment 6*).

14 January

The Grand Master writes to senior members of the Order in order to explain the current situation, particularly highlighting his concerns about the commission of inquiry nominated by the Holy See (*see Attachment 7*).

23 January

Monsignor Robert Murphy, secretary to Cardinal Parolin, calls the Grand Master on his private telephone in the evening, informing him that the Holy Father wishes to see him the following evening. The Grand Master is to tell no one of this appointment, and to bring no one with him.

24 January

The Grand Master goes to see Pope Francis at 5pm. At the meeting they are alone, except for the presence of a translator. Pope Francis says that he wants to make certain changes in the Order, and that this would be easiest done without a Grand Master. He then asks the Grand Master to resign. The Grand Master immediately agrees to resign, and Pope Francis asks him to put this in writing, specifying Cardinal Burke's role in the affair.

25 January

Pope Francis writes to the Grand Master accepting his resignation. Cardinal Parolin writes a letter to the members of the Sovereign Council stating (incorrectly) that according to Article 17, the Grand Commander was already Lieutenant of the Order and should act accordingly, communicating this fact to the various states with whom the Order has diplomatic relations and to the various bodies of the Order worldwide. Cardinal Parolin also states that the Holy Father has decided that all acts of the Grand Master since 6 December 2016 are null and void, along with those of the Sovereign Council – including the election of a Grand Chancellor Ad Interim.

The Order releases a statement saying that the Grand Master is to convene an extraordinary meeting of the Sovereign Council in order to offer them his resignation, in accordance with the Constitutional Charter and Code of the Order.

27 January

The Holy Father again writes to members of the Sovereign Council and to the Grand Commander, whom he addresses as the Lieutenant of the Order.

28 January

During lunch, Archbishop Becciu (not yet the Papal Delegate) telephones the Grand Master to remind him that the Holy Father greatly hopes that the Grand Master will not go back on his word to resign. The Grand Master offers his resignation to the Sovereign Council.

During the meeting, members of the Sovereign Council are individually telephoned by Archbishop Becciu telling them to accept the Grand Master's resignation.

The resignation of the Grand Master is accepted by a majority of the Sovereign Council. In addition, the Lieutenant annuls the decrees signed by the former Grand Master since 6 December; the former Grand Chancellor is reinstated.