

MELITENSIA

THE MALTA STUDY CENTER AT THE HILL MUSEUM & MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY

Spring 2012

The Latin word Melitensia denotes "things pertaining to Malta," and it is most frequently used in the world of rare books and manuscripts to describe written collections of the history and culture of the island of Malta.

This newsletter reports the activities of the Malta Study Center, and features information about the history of the Knights of Malta and the history and culture of the country of Malta itself.

We welcome your comments and your communication about others who might share an interest in this core program of the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library.

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Early Mediterranean Travel

Rhodes and Malta are popular day stops for Mediterranean cruise ships. In both cases, the obvious attraction is the city and the harbor fortifications built by the Knights of the Hospital. The cruise ships anchor within the harbors, and the tourists are immediately surrounded by the history and the heritage that the Knights bequeathed to Rhodes and Malta. 21st-century tourists blog about their visit to Rhodes and Malta, relating their experience and giving advice to others who intend to follow the same path. Although they may not know it, they are following in the footsteps of travelers dating back to the 14th century, who came to see the Knights and who wrote about it for others to read.

The 14th-century visitors who came to Rhodes were pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. Rhodes was not their final destination, but it was a convenient port for ships continuing on to Alexandria, Acre, and Jaffa, and it offered travelers an opportunity to rest and refresh

themselves. The earliest pilgrims' accounts of their journey to Jerusalem reflect their focus on their final destination. They did not describe the buildings (although they noted that the walls were massive) nor did they write much about the Knights who lived there. Instead, they were clearly disappointed by the meager number of relics on view in the Conventual Church. The only two worth mentioning were a thorn from the Crown of Thorns and a cross made from the basin that Christ used to wash the feet of his disciples. This changed by the end of the 15th century, especially after the unsuccessful Ottoman siege of Rhodes in 1480. Visitors were fascinated by the Knights themselves, who provided hospitality to visiting pilgrims and guided them to sites of interest.

Bernhard von Breydenbach, Dean of Mainz, published the first printed guidebook for pilgrims to Jerusalem, *Peregrinationes in Terram Sanctam (Pilgrimages to the Holy Land)*, in 1486. He conducted a research pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1483, accompanied by a retinue that included several ghost writers and Erhard Reuwich, a painter from Utrecht whose job was to draw the places Breydenbach visited and create

Right: The City of Rhodes, fold-out woodcut from Bernhard von Breydenbach, *Peregrinatio in terram sanctam (Pilgrimage to the Holy Land)* (Mainz, 1486). Erhard Reuwich was the first artist who drew Rhodes from life, apparently from the deck of a ship.



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Left: The City of Rhodes, woodcut from Hartmann Schedel *The Nuremberg Chronicle* (1493). The artist Anton Koberger freely adapted elements from Reuwich's woodcut to create this view of Rhodes from the harbor. Saint John's University, Arca Artium collection.

Middle: The City of Rhodes, woodcut from Guillemme Caoursin *Rhodium historia* (1480-1489) (*History of Rhodes*) (Ulm, 1496). This bird's-eye view of Rhodes fits Reuwich's composition onto a single page.

Right: Title page of Burchard Niderstedt, *Malta vetus et nova* (*Malta, Old and New*) (Helmstedt, 1660). Niderstedt's description of Malta shaped the way generations of visitors perceived the islands. From the collection of the Malta Study Center.

woodcuts for publication. Breydenbach intended to publish his journey as a definitive guidebook in Latin and German, but editions appeared in other vernacular European languages for the next 36 years. Breydenbach's words and images told his readers what they should know about Rhodes. After describing his party's arrival, he cataloged the relics in the castle and the Conventual Church. The Order's relic collection had improved immensely since the early 14th century. The Sultan Bayezid sent the Order the arm of John the Baptist in 1484, just in time for Breydenbach to see it and list it among all the other relics available for view: one of the 30 pieces of silver that Judas received for betraying Christ; the heads of Sts Philomena, Eufemia, and Polycarp, plus a head from one of Ursula's 10,000 virgins; the hands of Sts Claire and Anne, and, in addition to the arm of John the Baptist, portions of the arms of Sts Blaise, Stephen, George, Thomas, Katherine, and Leodegard. Breydenbach also included in his appendix a pirated edition of Guillaume Caoursin's history of

the Ottoman siege of Rhodes in 1480, permitting the visitor to be fully informed about the history of the city.

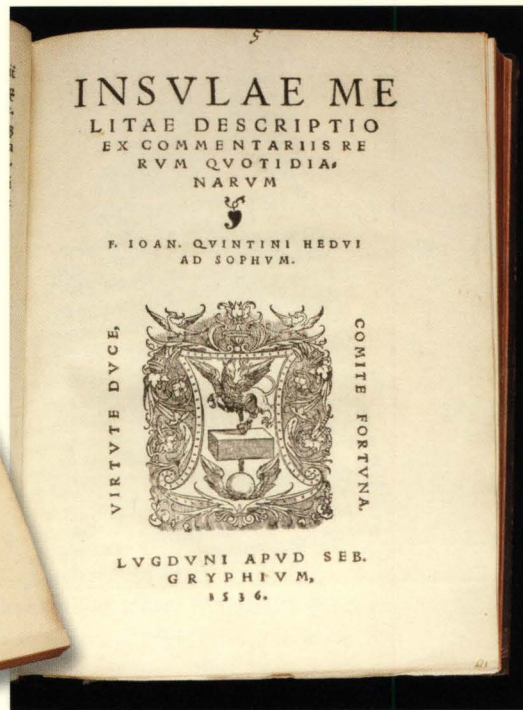
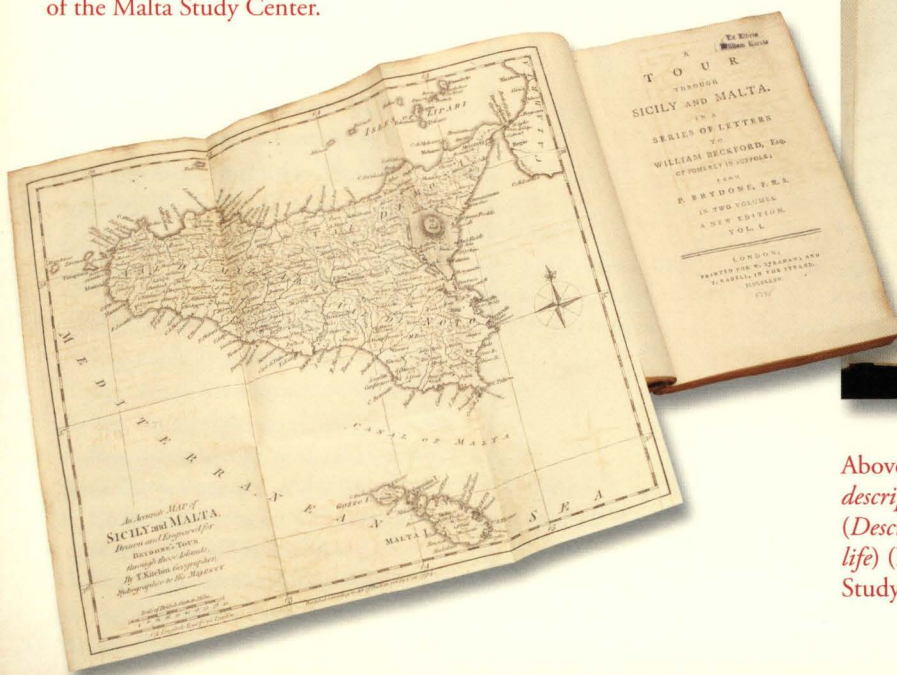
The travelers who visited the Knights on Malta were not pilgrims, nor were they particularly interested in relics. During the 17th century, Malta became a stop on the Grand Tour, a journey that young men of good family took through the Mediterranean to complete their education. Ideally, the Grand Tour permitted young aristocrats to experience Greco-Roman art and architecture and, at the same time, meet European nobility. While Malta lacked the Greco-Roman temples of Rome and Athens, after 1530 it was home to the Knights, and it became common for young men on the Grand Tour to visit the island to experience the Order's aristocratic society and culture. At first, their only guidebook to Malta was Jean Quintin's *Insulae Melitae descriptio* (*Description of the Island of Malta*), first published in Lyons in 1536 and later reprinted throughout the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. Quintin,

chaplain and later Knight of the Order, served grand master Philip Villiers de l'Isle Adam on Malta and wrote his book based upon his own knowledge of the islands. The book, which became the source for all future descriptions of the islands, began with a history and description of the island's geography and landscape, and identified the significant sights to see on the islands as the Order's castle and auberges in Birgu (Valletta had not yet been built), the site of St. Paul's shipwreck and grotto, some of the prehistoric temples (which Quintin believed dated from the classical era), and the city of Mdina.

Quintin's book was somewhat outdated after the Great Siege of 1565 and the subsequent construction of Valletta, but Burchard Niderstedt's *Malta vetus et nova (Malta Old and New)*, published in Helmstedt in 1660, provided updated information. Niderstedt's more ambitious work described the location of Malta; the shipwreck of St. Paul, his grotto, and the miraculous nature of the rock found there (which supposedly neutralized snake venom); the customs of Malta; descriptions of Gozo and Comino; descriptions of the cities of Valletta, Borgo, Senglea, and Mdina; references to the numerous crypts, sepulchres, catacombs, and caves found on the islands; and, finally, the previous rulers of the islands. Niderstedt concluded with the history of the Knights, their arrival on Malta, their government of Malta, instructions on how to become a Knight of Malta, and the statutes of the Church of Malta.

Below: Title page of Patrick Brydone, *A Tour through Sicily and Malta in a Series of Letters*. (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1775). The fold-out map shows the sites Brydone visited in Sicily and Malta. From the collection of the Malta Study Center.

Patrick Brydone's visit to Sicily and Malta might represent the epitome of the Grand Tour to Hospitaller Malta. His trip, which he recounted in a series of letters, was first published in 1773 and was reprinted many times in the late 18th century. His itinerary could have been based on Niderstedt: he arrived in Valletta by ship, then visited Mdina and the catacombs in Rabat. Grand Master Pinto received him, and he visited the grand master's palace in Buskett, which Grand Master Verdala had built as a hunting lodge in the late 17th century. Brydone didn't think Buskett would be considered much of a forest anywhere except for on Malta, which had few trees. He visited the grotto of St. Paul, where he filled his pockets with the miraculous stone. Brydone, however, was most fascinated by the Knights of Malta and their customs, which he thought contained in one place all the characteristics of the European nobility. Brydone would be one of the last to visit Malta of the Knights; the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars would end their rule in 1798. The Napoleonic Wars also marked the beginning of the end of the Grand Tour; British rule over Malta and the adoption of steam-powered ships changed Maltese tourism forever.



Above: Title page of Jean Quintin, *Insulae Melitae descriptio: ex commentariis rerum quotidianorum (Description of the Island of Malta, from notes of daily life)* (Lyons, 1536). From the collection of the Malta Study Center.

RECENT ACQUISITION

The Malta Study Center recently acquired an incunable: Pierre d'Aubusson's *De obsidione urbis Rhodiae* (*On the Siege of the City of Rhodes*), printed in Strassburg in 1480. Incunables are books printed during the first generation of the printing press, before 1501. These earliest books are becoming more rare. Many have disappeared, and we know them only by their titles. Others may only survive in one or two copies. As artifacts, they reveal essential information about the development of the craft of printing and the habits of their readers. Only 18 copies of d'Aubusson's book survive, and two of them are broadsides—single sheets that served as the newspapers of their day. The Center's copy is a small, ten-page book that circulated as a pamphlet.

The contents are an account of the Ottoman siege of Rhodes that Pierre d'Aubusson, Master of the Order of the Hospital, wrote in the form of a letter addressed to Frederick III, Holy Roman Emperor, dated September 13, 1480. The army of Sultan Mehmet II had surrounded the city with guns and bombards on May 23, 1480. D'Aubusson had personally led the defense of the city for the next 88 days. After the Ottoman army left, the Order of the

Hospital commissioned its vice-chancellor, Guillaume Caoursin, to write the official history of the siege for publication. It formed the basis for d'Aubusson's letter, which was addressed to Pope Sixtus IV as well as the Holy Roman Emperor. The accounts by d'Aubusson and Caoursin were reprinted many times in different cities, testifying to the popularity of their works. Europeans were fascinated by the details of the siege, the heroism of the defenders, and the horrors of the Ottoman attack.

D'Aubusson's *De obsidione urbis Rhodiae* joins the Center's copy of Guillaume Caoursin's *Description of the Siege of Rhodes*, which it acquired some years ago. The two incunables are important witnesses to the realities of warfare and conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean.



Left: First page of Pierre d'Aubusson, *De obsidione urbis Rhodiae* (*On the Siege of the City of Rhodes*). (Strassburg, 1480). From the collection of the Malta Study Center.

The Magna Curia Castellania

Grand Master Juan de Homedes established the Magna Curia Castellania (MCC) in 1543 to hear civil and criminal cases involving the inhabitants of Malta and Gozo. The tribunal, which was under the jurisdiction of the Master of the Order, was the largest and busiest court on the island. Its chief officer, the Castellano, was a Knight of the Order. The remaining court personnel consisted of a civil judge, a criminal judge, an exchequer, a vice-exchequer, two notaries, and several clerks. The tribunal heard both civil suits and criminal trials concerning domestic violence, assault, theft, fights, or appointment of guardians for children. A separate Appellate Court heard appeals to its judgments. The Knights were exempt from its jurisdiction because they were prosecuted within the Order.

The records of the Magna Curia Castellania are essential for modern researchers because the testimony reveals customs and practices that have otherwise been forgotten, or provides corroborating information about important historical events. Francesca Balzan used the MCC, among other archival sources, to research *Jewelry in Malta: Treasures from the Island of the Knights (1530-1798)* (Valletta: Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti, 2009). Kenneth Gambin, *Two death sentences by the inquisition tribunal of Malta, 1639* (Malta: Midsea Books, 2006) determined that prisoners of the Inquisition condemned to death were released to the MCC for the sentences to be fulfilled. The prison registers of the MCC provide

more information about the September 1775 Rebellion, popularly known as “The Rising of the Priests,” and suggests that there may have been more lay participation than previously thought. The court even weighed in to verify the authenticity of rocks acquired from St. Paul’s Grotto. The registers also contain some surprises, like Luca de Armenia’s poem *Ad Patriam (O Melita Infelix)* about the Great Siege in 1565, found in the volume dated 1565-1566 of the “Cedulae, Supplicationum et Taxationes” section of the MCC.

The Court continued in existence after the departure of the Knights in 1798. The judicial records for the years 1530 until 1899 were transferred from the Palace in Valletta, where they were in the custody of the Courts of Justice, to the Banca Giuratale in Mdina where they are located today, in the custody of the National Archives of Malta. The Malta Study Center signed an agreement with the National Archives of Malta in October 2007 to digitize the Acta Originalia of the Magna Curia Castellania. Since then, the studio in the Banca Giuratale has digitized volumes 1 through 710, covering the years 1545 through 1717. There are 1,411 volumes in all, covering the period between 1543 and 1798. In addition, the 25-volume handwritten index that Dr. G. Portelli Carbone prepared in the late 19th century has been digitized, and the National Archives has made PDFs of the scans available on its website.

The Magna Curia Castellania contains 24 series and a number of indexes:

1. Acta Originalia, 1543-1798, 1,411 volumes (currently being digitized)
2. Registrum Depositorum, 1560-1798, 170 volumes
3. Supplicationes ad aperiendas Caupones, 1699-1798, 19 volumes
4. Cedulae, Supplicationum et Taxationis, 1564-1747, 31 volumes
5. Registrum Actorum Originalium, 1535-1797, 232 volumes
6. Reg. Partit. Bullarum, 1592-1624, 1 volume
7. Reg. Revel. Mancip. etc., 1588-1617, 1 volume
8. Reg. Vendit. Urucarum, 1747, 1 volume
9. Reg. Actor. Criminalium, 1586-1599, 1 volume
10. Collectio Pramm. et Bannor., 1787-1798, 1 volume
11. Collectio Scrutinium, Officialium Creandorum ab Em. Mag. Mag., 1654-1782, 1 volume
12. Reg. Supp. Gratiae, 1750-1798, 5 volumes
13. Reg. Carcerator. Debit. Civil., 1600-1814, 16 volumes
14. Reg. Patentarum, 1564-1798, 37 volumes
15. Liber Depositorum, 1664-1798, 28 volumes
16. Acta Subhastar., 1681-1755, 29 volumes
17. Reg. Sententiarum, 1739-1798, 19 volumes
18. Reg. Cederal. I & II Decret., 1675-1797, 11 volumes
19. Reg. Invent. Haereditar., 1634-1733, 4 volumes
20. Reg. Privilegiorum, 1598-1798, 2 volumes
21. Reg. Confirm. Tutelae, 1780-1798, 1 volume
22. Reg. Taxat. Alimentor., 1723-1798, 1 volume
23. Acta Inventarior., Bonor., 1700-1788, 7 volumes
24. Reg. Subhastar., 1682-1699, 1 volume
25. Indexes: Acta Originalia, 25 volumes
 - a. Sentent., 5 volumes;
 - b. Subhastae, 1 volume;
 - c. Privilegia, Cedulae I & II Decreti, Inventar. Haereditar., Inventar. Bonorum, Cedulae Confirmat. Tutel., Cedulae Taxation. Alimentor., 1 volume

Micallef Named Honorary Officer

Joseph S. Micallef, UOM, KM, Malta's Honorary Consul General in St. Paul, Minnesota, was made an Honorary Officer of the National Order of Merit of Malta. The President of Malta, George Abela, conferred the honor in a ceremony held in the Palace in Valletta on September 21, 2011, Independence Day.



George Abela, President of Malta (right), makes Joseph S. Micallef an Honorary Officer of the National Order of Merit.

The National Order of Merit pays tribute to Maltese citizens who distinguish themselves in different fields of endeavor. There are four grades: Companion of Honor, Companion, Officer, and Member. The number of living recipients is restricted by grade. Companion of Honor is the highest grade. In addition to past and present Presidents and Prime Ministers of Malta, who are ex officio Members of the National Order of Merit, there can only be three other living Companions of Honor. The lower grades: two Companions, three Officers, and ten members. There may be any number of Honorary Members, who are foreign nationals who have distinguished themselves in service to Malta. Mr. Micallef, who is chair of the Friends of the Malta Study Center, had previously been made an Honorary Member of the Order in 1998.

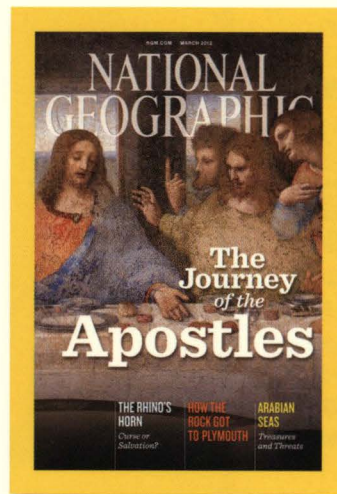
Ambassador Robert Shafer Hosts Event in New York

Ambassador Robert L. Shafer, KM, and his wife, Ellen Shafer, DM, hosted a soirée at the Mission of the Permanent Observer of the Order of Malta at the United Nations in New York City on February 8, 2012. Members of the Order of Malta included Ms. Nicky Benz Carpenter, DM, and Frà Elie de Comminges, KJ.

The evening included two slide presentations featuring the work of the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML). HMML executive director, Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB, presented stories and images that chronicled how HMML is continuing the Benedictine legacy of preserving endangered ancient Christian manuscripts using modern technologies. Curator of HMML's Malta Study Center, Theresa Vann, presented images from HMML's preservation studios at the Notarial Archives, the National Archives of Malta, and the Priory of Rome.

HMML's Fr. Columba Stewart Quoted in *National Geographic*

HMML's executive director, Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB, is quoted in the March 2012 issue of *National Geographic* magazine. "The Journey of the Apostles" traces the evangelization paths of St. Thomas and other Apostles.



HMML and its partners have been digitally preserving the cultural heritage of the St. Thomas Christians—one of the largest Syrian communities in the world—since 2009. The history of this ancient Christian culture is handwritten on palm leaf manuscripts and tells the story of St. Thomas in Kerala, India, in the first century.

HMML Wins IMLS Medal

The Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML) was awarded the 2011 National Medal for Museum and Library Service. The National Medal is the nation's highest honor for libraries and museums and is sponsored by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a federal agency. HMML was one of five libraries and five museums chosen to receive this annual award. Medal winners were selected from nationwide nominations for institutions that demonstrate innovative approaches to public service, outstanding community outreach, and advancement of global cultural understanding. U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN) nominated HMML for the award. The winners were honored at a Washington, DC, ceremony in December.



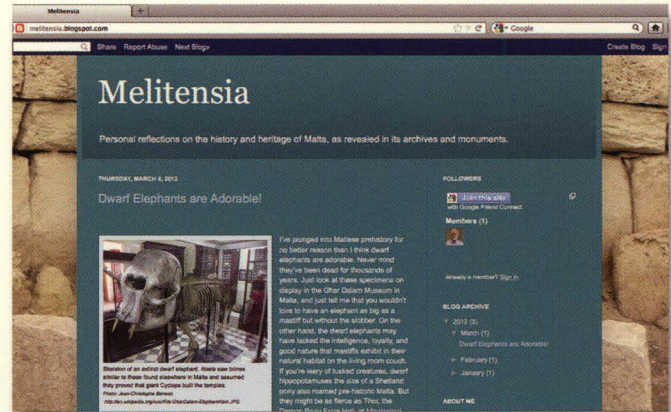
Cataloger Emeritus and Curator of the Ethiopia Study Center Dr. Getatchew Haile (seated) accepted the National Medal award on HMML's behalf. Standing from left to right: HMML executive director Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB, NPR Senior News Analyst Cokie Roberts, HMML Board Chair Tom Joyce, and Director of the IMLS Susan Hildreth.

Notarial Archives Update

The pilot project funded by the Laura Jane Musser Foundation at the Notarial Archives officially ended in September 2011, when the Malta Study Center signed an agreement with the Notarial Archives and the Friends of the Notarial Archives to digitize 16th-century notarial records. Witnesses included Dr. Jason Azzopardi, Parliamentary Secretary, and Joseph S. Micallef. The project has also received support from HSBC Bank Malta, which has instituted a Volunteer Leave Day scheme encouraging its employees to volunteer at the studio digitizing registers. Between July and September 2011, HSBC employees volunteered more than 300 hours of work and digitized more than 27,000 folios.

Curator's Activities

Theresa Vann, the Joseph S. Micallef Curator of the Malta Study Center, is using social media to stay in touch with friends and users of the Malta Study Center. The Malta Study Center now has a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/HMML.MSC>.



For those interested in what's on her mind at any given time, please follow her periodical blog at <http://melitensia.blogspot.com>. Recent topics have included the history of St. Paul's shipwreck on Malta, her fascination with extinct dwarf elephants, and a long-forgotten dispute over inheritance heard by the Grand Master's court in Birgu. Her most recent blog post gives more information about the Center's recently-purchased incunabula.

HMML Invites Applications for Heckman Scholarship

HMML invites applications for A.A. Heckman Fund research stipends. Up to ten stipends in amounts of up to \$2,000 are awarded yearly. The stipends may be used to defray the cost of travel, room and board, microfilm reproduction, photo-duplication, and other expenses associated with research at HMML. Length of residency may range from two weeks to six months. Undergraduate, graduate, or postdoctoral scholars (those who are within three years of completing a terminal master's or doctoral degree) are eligible. The program is specifically intended to help scholars who have not yet established themselves professionally and whose research cannot progress satisfactorily without consulting materials to be found in the collections of the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library.

For application information and deadlines visit www.hmml.org and click on the research link, or enter "Heckman" in the search box.



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Below: Indexes to the Magna Curia Castellania
 in the reading room of the Banca Giuratale,
 National Archives of Malta.



FRIENDS OF THE MALTA STUDY CENTER

The Friends of the Malta Study Center is an advisory group that meets annually and establishes mission and vision, provides oversight in financial matters, and ensures that the organization has the financial resources it needs to do its work.

Nicky B. Carpenter
 Wayzata, MN

Joseph S. Micallef
 Committee Chair
 Saint Paul, MN

Frà Elie de Comminges
 Margaretville, NY

Robert Shafer
 New York, NY

Philip Farugia Random
 Valletta, Malta

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