



Sisters  
Hospitallers

CONTIGO

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“Look to the past with gratitude, live the present with passion and embrace the future with hope”

(Pope Francis, message of the Year of Consecrated Life)



## The Sisters Hospitallers and the Brothers of St John of God have brought the centenary of the “passing into life” of St Benedict Menni to a close



Closing Eucharist of the Centenary of the death of St Benedict Menni

From 22 to 24 April, around 350 people from everywhere in the world where there is a Hospitaller presence gathered together in Ciempozuelos (Spain), the place where the restoration of the order was consolidated and our institution was founded. Sisters, brothers, users, collaborators and residents of the town jointly celebrated the closing of the centenary of the death of St Benedict Menni.

### Wednesday, 22 April

The welcome ceremony for the pilgrims was held on 22 April in the function room of our mother house, where the Mayoress of Ciempozuelos, María Ángeles Herrera, together with the Provincial Superiors, María Rosario Iranzo, a Sister Hospitaller, and José Antonio Soria, a Brother of St John of God, welcomed all the attendees.

In her speech, María Ángeles Herrera highlighted how proud everyone in Ciempozuelos is of St Benedict Menni for his dedication to the municipality and for his legacy. That is why he was named the town's co-patron saint and adopted son in 2008 and the Council recognised Ciempozuelos as a Hospitaller Town in 2009.

The event ended with a concert of various musical styles, in which the Ciempozuelos music band, performed internationally well-known covers. It was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone in attendance.



Provincial Superiors with the Mayoress of Ciempozuelos



### Thursday morning, 23 April

The day started with a Eucharist in the church in the complex of the Brothers of St John of God in Ciempozuelos, presided over by the Bishop José Luis Redrado, OH

#### The Superior Generals' Greeting

Next, in the function room, the Superior Generals welcomed participants to these days of meeting, cohabitation and reflection on the figure of St Benedict Menni.

In her greeting, Anabela Carneiro, the Superior General of the Sisters Hospitallers pointed out the happy coincidence of this centenary with the Year of Consecrated Life. She invited us to take on board Pope Francis's proposal "to look to the past with gratitude, live the present with passion and

embrace the future with hope".

Brother Jesús Etayo asked us not to forget this year's celebrations and experiences and for Benedict Menni's spirit to live on among us and for us to continue finding solutions for the sick and needy.

#### Conference talks

The morning continued with conference talks given by Brother Luis Valero, who discussed "St Benedict Menni, 1867–1912. Contributions to St John of God Hospitality", and Sister María Concepción Ochotorena, who presented "Father Benedict Menni, the life behind the heart". Both highlighted the role this Hospitaller saint played during the second half of the nineteenth century and they remembered his strength and dedication to the foundation of the Congregation of Sisters

**"...not to forget this year's celebrations and experiences and for Benedict Menni's spirit to live on among us ..."**

Hospitallers despite the spiritual and structural crisis of the age and the limited resources available to him. A short break was followed by a roundtable of hospitality testimonies, coordinated by Brother Julián Sánchez, in which representatives of both institutions participated. The morning ended with a fraternal meal in the gardens of the complex.



## HOSPITALITY TESTIMONIES

**“Everything I have experienced fills me with gratitude to the Lord for calling me to be and live from and for Hospitality”**



Ana María Domene

I arrived in San Boi (Barcelona, Spain) 26 years ago with two friends with a desire to help

people as a volunteer. When the doors of the Benito Menni Mental Health Care Complex opened for us, what we saw there, the welcome we received from the Sisters, and the people who lived there, had a huge impact on me. I remember that when I arrived, I was convinced that I wanted to do something for others, based on my Christian faith, but God was just an idea, something I had been taught, rather than an essential experience for me. When I returned home, I asked God: “Do you think that I could

go back there sometime?”

My question was answered a month later; we went back thinking that there would be no third time... But it was when I entered the centre’s church that Maria Jesús (one of the centre’s users), sitting in her wheelchair, and even though she found speaking extremely difficult (she only moved her hand), with eyes that expressed everything that her voice was not able to do, and after only seeing me once before, called me by my name:

"Ana". That was the moment when I felt God's presence in a way that I had never felt before. Jesus's words "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did to me" were embodied in her.

Picking up the Gospel and reading the passage on the Good Samaritan after this experience was like entering into a dialogue with someone I could touch and see; and especially, as far as I was concerned, these people became living temples of God, despite their difficulties, limitations and diseases.

### Life of service

My experience of Hospitality is rooted strongly in fertile land that has been watered by the life of service of those who came before me and who discovered in John of God, Benedict Menni, Maria Josefa Recio and Maria Angustias Giménez, a path to follow; not only have we continued to follow this path, we are also confident that others will do so in the future.

Today, looking back, aware of everything I have experienced, I can say that I never doubted His call; if I am here with you today, it is because He and He alone has sustained my life. Because I too have felt hurt and on the edge of the path. He has healed my wounds, has washed my feet, has given me His weapons, a washbowl with water, a towel, and a Mother, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

Everything I have experienced fills me with gratitude to the Lord for calling me to be and live from and for Hospitality, and I experience this Hospitality as a source and spring of compassion rising up from the depths of His Heart: "a boundless heart".

Ana María Domene  
Sister Hospitaller

## "They conveyed the values that Benedict Menni lived for and demonstrated with his actions"



Paula María Álvarez

My story is about a life project, about seeking a place in this world. During my search, I have tried to follow the values that I think are important for helping others. That is why I studied medicine, and I specialised in family

and community medicine. I wanted to be alongside people, accompany them in health, in sickness, in happiness and in sadness. I was fascinated by palliative care; its philosophy spoke of human values, and that's how I learnt that it was important not only to cure diseases, but, above all, to CARE for people in all aspects of their lives and accompany them through difficult moments, such as when they are dying.

This is how I learnt how important values such as empathy, solidarity, listening, accompanying, respect, and closeness were. It is important for the practice of my profession to be steeped in these values.

In March 2007 I had the opportunity to work in a Sisters Hospitallers centre. This was a great revelation for me, because there they practised a value as important as HOSPITALITY. It was a value in capital letters, encompassing all the values required to care for people. Everything fascinated me: the welcome I received and which I saw others receive, the professionalism they displayed in their work (a perfect combination of technical quality and humanity) and the living example of the Sisters, who were the role model of this great hospitality, and who conveyed the values that Benedict Menni lived for and demonstrated with his actions.

Paula María Álvarez Manzanares  
A collaborator with Sisters Hospitallers



## “Today society demands something new from us; it is time to renew and update hospitality”



Eduardo Ribes

Rather than my personal testimony I would like to share some aspects that concern me as a Brother and how to relate to the spirit of Father Menni, which I hope will be significant from the point of view of hospitality.

Firstly, I was wondering about the number of events both congregations have celebrated for this reason and I asked myself: *“Is this going to be just another centenary?”* If this moment does not involve a change that leads us to reignite our passion and further explore our lives as Hospitallers, they will all end up being superficial events.

### Father Menni’s bravery

Today society demands something new from us; it is time to renew and update hospitality. We have to take steps to get closer to the reality of our suffering world. Surely we do not

lack Father Menni’s bravery to carve a path for hospitality in the twenty-first century? He knew how to read God’s steps in his life, to find a solution to the needs of the moment, yet how difficult it is for us to have more flexible structures that enable us to reach every last member of society. Undoubtedly problems and drawbacks will arise, but we are called to walk impetuously, with our gaze set on God and on humanity, with secure fearless steps, God will always be by our side. As Jesus says in the Gospel *“I will be with you every day, until the end of the world”*.

Another of Father Menni’s virtues that impresses me was his ability to cross frontiers and take the charism of hospitality to different continents. Today many of our brothers still lack the basic needs to survive and I believe we have the moral and institutional responsibility to spread awareness of the current of hospitality beyond our bounds. We are always able to do a little more than we do; we just have two snap out of this lethargy and stagnation to dedicate part of our time to collaborating and thinking about hospitality universally.

### Three basic pillars

I believe three basic pillars underpin my life:

- **Community life**, meeting my

“Se hoje voltasse a nascer, voltaria a ser Irmão de São João de Deus”

brothers and sisters, sharing my faith and my life. I always say that I’m in love with community life, and that doesn’t mean that there are no difficulties, moments of weakness, of crisis, but that desire to build, to grow in fraternity always rises back up to the surface.

- **A life of faith**, both community and personal. This is where I believe our future is at stake. I am more and more convinced that people can tell from a distance if we are men and women of God, if the compassion we try to live our lives by as a charism is what marks us out as people, or as mere empty words.

- **Our mission**: the charism of hospitality, as an expression of this faith that I wish to share with everyone around me. In the same way that Father Menni lived, who always thought of Jesus as compassion in his experience of faith.

We cannot rest until we are hospitable to the core.

"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did to me". (Matthew 25:40)

If we view these moments as an opportunity to grow and explore, and if we are open to giving this centenary continuity and to taking full advantage of the joy of compassion, we can continue to lavish hospitality, since today we have a lot to give to the Church and to so-

ciety.

I will finish by using the words that I once heard an older brother say: "If I were born for a second time, I would be a brother of St John of God again"

Eduardo Ribes  
Brother of St John of God

## **"I am a father of two girls. After them, this has been the most intense and important experience I have had"**

I work for the NGO Juan Ciudad, one of the tools that OH has in Spain to work on development cooperation issues. We work with the centres that OH has in other countries, especially in Africa and Latin America.

In 2014, the Ebola epidemic was affecting West African countries, especially Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The OH has hospitals in Sierra Leone and Liberia. In Liberia, during the first days of August, Ebola caused the death of three Brothers of St John of God (the entire community) and one sister of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, who are working together. The Liberian government ordered the closure of Saint Joseph's Catholic Hospital on 1 August.

I was part of the team that

Juan Ciudad ONGD sent to the country on 25 August. There were three people in the team, one Brother of St John of God, Justino Izquierdo, one Missionary Sister of the Immaculate Conception, María Ángeles Llopart and myself as a layperson. I had been to this hospital several times since 2007, so I knew the city and the people there.

Our first objective was to represent the institution in the hospital and in the difficult situation that the city found itself in. This objective then expanded to form the basis for the reopening of the hospital, which included cleaning and disinfection, training of personnel and working together with other organisations.

I stayed there for three months until 17 November.



Roberto Lorenzo

The hospital's maternity ward reopened on 24 November.

I am a father of two girls. After them, this has been the most intense and important experience I have had. I approached this as a personal opportunity and I am very grateful to have had the opportunity of experiencing something like this.

Roberto Lorenzo  
A collaborator of HSJD

### Thursday evening, 23 April

One of the most anticipated moments of the day began at six o'clock in the evening when the attendees, gathered in the function room of the complex of the Sisters Hospitallers to enjoy a play based on the figure of St Benedict Menni.

But first two celebrated pilgrims, a married couple who had come from Milan, relations of St Benedict Menni (Guiseppe Vada and Rosanna Celolin), went up on stage to greet the attendees. They expressed how happy and emotional they were to experience that moment as it helped them to understand the work and legacy of this great saint.

The first piece was performed by the Purísima Concepción Foundation of Granada. It was entitled *"Dreams and Pathways... 100% Hospitality"*. Combining several arts, a group of students and users, together with teachers and volunteers, ventured to experience, express and share the great work of St Benedict Menni with an instrumental band called *"Music from Within"* and two puppet shows *"Benedict and Company"*.

Next, patients and collaborators of the two Ciempozuelos Hospitaller complexes gave the second performance of the evening, which represented some passages of the life of St Benedict Menni.

Both performances were full of joy, creativity and companionship; they were thoroughly enjoyed by the attendees who found them a truly memorable experience.

### Monolith reminder of the centenary

When the performances were over the pilgrims made their way to the gardens of the Chapel of the Virgen del Consuelo. The Superior General and the Mayoress of this Hospitaller town uncovered a monolith as a permanent reminder of this centenary. The president of the Brotherhood of Consolation gave Sister Anabela records proving that the Father belonged to this Brotherhood.

*"St Benedict was part of the Association of Devotees of Our Lady of Consolation, the patron of Ciempozuelos, from 1890. Ten years later, in 1900, he became the commissioner and member of the governing body of this association, as stated in the records in the files of this Brotherhood (records dated 22 October 1890, and the year 1900)"* the Mayoress explained in her speech.

### Prayer Vigil

When night fell, a prayer vigil took place during which some people presented their Hospitality testimonies. Gradually, in the Lord's presence, the attendees lit their candles; thus, everyone made a small contribution so that the warm light of hospitality could illuminate both the church in the complex and all the people gathered there.



### Friday, 24 April

To conclude the closing events of the centenary, a solemn Eucharist was held in the church of the Sisters Hospitallers, presided over by the Bishop of Getafe, Joaquín María López de Andújar.

There we asked the Lord, through our founders, for our institutions to continue marking the presence of the face of God's compassion through the exercise of hospitality. For Him to make us daring and creative so we can attend to the most vulnerable and needy in our neighbourhoods.

During the ceremony, a choir, formed by sisters and collaborators, performed a selection of Hospitaller songs composed by Sister Francisca Hernández on the occasion of the centenary; they were accompanied on the organ by Brother Ramón Castejón.

One of the highlights of the Eucharist was when mention was made of the brothers and sisters celebrating 25, 50 and 75 years in the religious profession. Those present then renewed their vows.

### A Boundless Heart

Under the theme "ST BENEDICT MENNI: A BOUNDLESS HEART", this has been a very special meaningful year for the entire Hospitaller Community,

*"Since we have been able to explore the figure of a man, who, "moved by a love that knows no bounds, that knows not how to say enough", made hospitality a palpable reality at the service of the sick and needy, the "living images" of Jesus"*

*since we have been able to explore the figure of a man, who, "moved by a love that knows no bounds, that knows not how to say enough", made hospitality a palpable reality at the service of the sick and needy, the "living images of Jesus".*

Let us walk with St Benedict Menni and allow his spirit to encourage us to be prophets of hospitality worldwide!





## HOSPITALER SONGS



### HOSPITALITY (F. Hernández)

**Hospitality, Hospitality  
Today as yesterday and always**

1. Since Abraham welcomed three strangers,  
God has visited us in human form.
2. If a Samaritan is going to pass  
by your side, do not take a different path;  
God is in him.
3. When God comes to us  
in a thousand forms,  
let us be open to Him with love.

### A OUR MOTHER (F. Hernández)

**Our Mother of the Sacred  
Heart, who pleads for those  
that turn to you, do not  
abandon us, bestow us with  
your favour.**

1. Christ has appointed you  
the keeper of His Heart.  
OUR MOTHER. Open the never-  
ending spring of His Redemption.
2. The work of the Spirit and your  
Son, the Congregation,  
YOU, THE MOTHER,  
open the gates  
and bless our land with  
Hospitality.

### A BOUNDLESS HEART (F. Hernández)

**A boundless heart  
travelling through life.  
A heart that is always ready  
to do the bidding of the voice of God.**

1. Son of the Church, faithful priest,  
Herald of Christ, always at His feet.
2. Nothing daunts you, you always trust  
in He who guides your great mission.
3. Christ hurries you along the path,  
for Faith is concealed in the helpless.
4. You gave your life as did our Lord  
drinking from His chalice until the end.
5. From your rest in Glorious Christ  
bless the Charism of Hospitality.
6. Together with those that suffer, with all the  
Church. We give glory to the Father for  
your charity.



### **Prayer to ST. BENEDICT MENNI**

Oh God of infinite mercy, it is with great happiness that we thank you for the gift of hospitality, on the centenary of the death of St. Benedict Menni.

In your compassionate love he discovered the power of charity. His faith in Jesus Christ led him to dedicate his life to the poor and the sick, and the power of the Holy Spirit made him pilgrim and prophet of hospitality.

On the occasion of his intercession, we ask for the poor and the sick to find relief from their suffering, comfort from their pain and the recovery of their health.

Please help those who carry out the Hospitaller mission to offer their humble and committed service, showing the compassion of Christ and the merciful Truth.

We ask you, Father, who together with the Son and the Holy Spirit, are love itself.  
Amen.

**1914 - 2014**  
**SAINT  
BENEDICT  
MENNI**  
CENTENARY  
OF HIS DEATH

