

Fr. Fortunato Mizzi's Contributions to Maltese Catholics in Toronto¹

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The efforts and role of the Catholic Church in the development of non-English speaking immigrant communities who settled in Toronto at the end of the 19th century and the first three decades of the twentieth century is generally well documented.² There is also a rather impressive literature on the growth and struggles of ethnic parishes in Toronto during this same period.³ This research includes work on the contribution

¹ I would like to thank Robert Berard (Mount St. Vincent University) for encouraging me to write this paper. I also thank Elizabeth Smyth (OISE/UT), Roberto Perin (York University), and the three anonymous reviewers for comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper. The research for this paper was supported by research grants from Mount St. Vincent University (1997), Acadia University (1998), and The University of Toronto (2000).

² See, for example, Luigi Pautasso, "Archbishop Fergus P. McEvay and the Betterment of Toronto's Italians," *Italian Canadiana*, 5, 1989, 56-103; Mark G. McGowan, "Toronto's English-Speaking Catholics, Immigration, and the Making of a Canadian Catholic Identity, 1900-30," in T. Murphy and G. Stortz (Eds.) *Creed and Culture: The Place of English-Speaking Catholics in Canadian Society, 1750-1930* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 204-45; Linda F. Wicks, "'There Must Be No Drawing Back': the Catholic Church's Efforts on Behalf of Non-English Speaking Immigrants in Toronto 1889-1939" (M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1998); and Roberto Perin, *The Immigrants' Church: The Third Force in Canadian Catholicism, 1880-1920* (Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Association, 1998).

³ See, for example, Zofia Sharodi, "The Experience of Polish Catholics in the Archdiocese of Toronto 1905-1935" in *Catholics at the "Gathering Place": Historical Essays on the Archdiocese of Toronto 1841-1991*, ed. by Mark G. McGowan and Brian P. Clarke (Toronto: Canadian Catholic Historical Association, 1993), 141-54; John Zucchi, "Church, Clergy, and Religious Life," in *Italians in Toronto: Development of a National Identity, 1875-1935* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 118-40; Zoriana

of the priests who came to Canada from the United States or the homelands of the diverse ethnic groups to assist their compatriots in their religious and spiritual needs. Most of this work has focussed primarily on major or predominant groups, such as the Italians, Poles, and Ukrainians. Lesser attention has been given to the smaller immigrant groups, such as the Maltese.

This paper attempts to assist in filling this gap by focussing on the contribution of Fr. Fortunato Mizzi O.F.M. Cap. (1880-1945) to the foundation and development of the Maltese community in Toronto as well as the establishment of the only Maltese national parish in North America, St. Paul the Apostle Church. The paper will outline Fr. Mizzi's work during his 29-year stay in Canada, and describe and analyze the work that he did between 1916 and 1922. During this period Fr. Mizzi worked hard to realize the project of establishing a mission for the Maltese immigrants in Toronto and vicinity. Notwithstanding the failure to materialize his intended project with the Maltese, his efforts and understanding of the needs of Maltese immigrants in Toronto contributed greatly to positive developments in the Maltese community in Toronto and to its strong ties with the Catholic Church. Before focussing on the main topic of the paper, a brief overview of Maltese immigration to Canada and the Maltese in Toronto, as well as the life of Fr. Mizzi will be offered as background.⁴

Emigration from Malta until the end of the nineteenth century, was, with few exceptions, to other Mediterranean regions and countries.⁵ It

Yaworsky Sokolsky, "The Beginnings of Ukrainian Settlement in Toronto, 1891-1939," in Robert Harney, Ed., *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Ethnic and Immigration Studies, 1985), 279-302; and Enrico Carlson Cumbo, "Impediments to the Harvest: The Limitations of Methodist Proselytization of Toronto's Italian Immigrants, 1905-1925," in *Catholics at the "Gathering Place,"* 155-76.

⁴ The information in this paper was gathered from the following sources: the Archives of the Capuchins in Montreal (ACM), the Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), the Archives of the Redemptorists in Toronto (ART), the Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Ottawa (ARCAO), the National Archives of Canada (NAC), the Archives of the Capuchins in Malta (ACMalta), and the Mizzi Family Archives in Malta (MFA) administered by Monsignor Fortunato Mizzi. I also interviewed Fr. Gabrielle Dextrase O.F.M. Cap., who was Fr. Mizzi's student in Ottawa in 1918, and several Maltese who came to Canada between 1920-1930.

⁵ Lawrence E. Attard, *Early Maltese Emigration (1900-1914)* (Malta: Gulf, 1983).

was only in the beginning of the twentieth century that the Maltese ventured to emigrate further away to English-speaking countries. The lack of success or even interest of Maltese emigration to distant countries until the turn of the twentieth century has been attributed to language and cultural “barriers.”⁶ Maltese emigration was very strongly tied to unemployment and economic conditions in Malta. The Malta Emigration Committee was established in 1907 as a result of the unemployment that resulted after the completion, in 1906, of the construction of the breakwater in the Grand Harbour of Valletta and other dockyard work.⁷ Yet until about 1911 there were only a handful of Maltese who had emigrated to Canada. The issue of Maltese emigrating to distant English-speaking countries had been a political issue in Malta since about 1880. Some politicians linked the British move to introduce English as a compulsory subject in schools with the issue of immigration to English-speaking countries.⁸ The Nationalists, lead by Dr. Fortunato Mizzi, Fr. Mizzi’s father, objected to the introduction of English in schools at the expense of Italian. Some Maltese priests objected to the teaching of English as this was seen as the first step in introducing the Maltese to Protestant beliefs.⁹ The Reformists, lead by Sigismondo Savona, were in favour of the teaching of English and also supported emigration to distant English-speaking countries. Some politicians argued that it was in the interest of the Maltese, especially those interested in emigration, to learn English. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the issue of

⁶ C.A. Price, *Malta and the Maltese: A Study in the 19th Century Migration* (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1954), 191-5.

⁷ Brian Blouet, *The Story of Malta* (London: Faber, 1972), 178.

⁸ Until the late 1870s, the language situation in Malta remained very much the same as it had been when Malta fell under British rule. While Maltese remained the language used by the majority of Maltese, Italian was used by the middle and upper classes and remained the language of education and the law-courts. However, the knowledge of English among Maltese increased gradually.

Between the late 1870s and mid-1930s language was a much debated issue in Malta. This debate was triggered by the recommendations of three reports in the late 1870s on different Maltese institutions. These reports recommended a more prominent role for English in both schools and government business, and for Maltese in schools. Despite the attempts to introduce language reforms, Italian remained the sole language used in the law-courts until 1899, when English was allowed to be used in certain cases. It was only in 1934 that Maltese replaced Italian as the primary language of the courts. In 1921 Italian and English were the official languages of Malta. Maltese replaced Italian in 1936. For more details see, David Marshall, *History of the Maltese Language in Local Education* (Malta: Malta University Press, 1971).

⁹ Edith Dobie, *Malta’s Road to Independence* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 56.

emigration to distant countries was heavily influenced by political polarization. While the Reformists argued that emigration to English-speaking countries of the British Empire would greatly assist the unemployed Maltese, the Anti-Reformists, lead by Dr. Mizzi, opposed this type of emigration on the basis that it would exploit Maltese labour.¹⁰ In 1911, as a result of unemployment on the island, a Royal Commission was established. One of the major recommendations of the 1912 report strongly suggested an increase of emigration to alleviate economic problems.¹¹

The earliest documented case of a Maltese emigrating to Canada is that of Louis Shickluna, who in 1838 settled in St. Catharines and is well known for his achievements in ship building.¹² Alphonse Vassallo was another Maltese who ventured to Canada in 1886 and eventually settled in Sydney, Nova Scotia, where he owned and managed a hotel.¹³ It is estimated that between 1911 and 1920 over 2,000 Maltese emigrated to Canada.¹⁴ Although eventually Toronto was the city that attracted the largest number of Maltese immigrants, by 1914 there were several

¹⁰ Paul Mizzi, "Maltese Emigration: Political Overtures," *Heritage: An Encyclopedia of Maltese Culture and Civilization*, 63, n.d., 1267.

¹¹ *Report of the Royal Commission on the Finances, Economic Condition and Judicial Procedures of Malta*, Part IV: Emigration (London: H.M.S.O., 1912).

¹² Peter D.A. Warwick, "Pioneer Shipbuilder of the Great Lakes," *Canadian Geographical Journal*, June/July, 1972, 26-9.

¹³ Richard S. Cumbo and John P. Portelli, *A Brief History of Early Maltese in Toronto and the Maltese-Canadian Society of Toronto* (Toronto: Maltese-Canadian Society of Toronto, 1997).

¹⁴ John D. Crawford, "Early Maltese Emigrants to the Canadian Prairies," *The Maltese Herald* (Australia), 24 March 1992, 13. This estimation is based on statistics from the Department of Emigration in Malta, and statistics published in Maltese newspapers at that time. Both Attard and Crawford have noted that it is difficult to determine the exact number of Maltese who emigrated to Canada in the first three decades of the twentieth century. They offer two reasons. First, there were Maltese who left for North Africa and later continued their journey to other countries. These may not have been listed as immigrants to Canada. Second, since the Maltese travelled with a British passport at times receiving countries did not list them as Maltese. See Attard, *The Great Exodus (1918-1939)*, and John D. Crawford, *The Maltese Diaspora: The Historical Development of Migration from Malta* (M.A. thesis, Department of History, University of Victoria, B.C., 1990).

Maltese who had settled in Vancouver, Calgary, and Winnipeg.¹⁵ In 1913 there were about 500 Maltese in Winnipeg who had even formed a Maltese Protective Association.¹⁶ In 1912-1913 we encounter the first official Maltese attempt to organize the emigration of Maltese men to Canada.¹⁷

Although Canadian authorities, Maltese newspapers, and prominent Maltese like Dr. Mattei¹⁸ had recommended and encouraged emigration to the western parts of Canada, Toronto and towns in its vicinity attracted the largest number of Maltese immigrants. The emigration of Maltese to Canada after June 1913 was partly supported by the efforts of the Canadian Catholic clergy who that summer had attended the International Eucharistic Congress held in Malta.¹⁹ In Ontario, the development of the Maltese community and the support from the Catholic Church was present from the early days. Several Maltese priests who were living in Canada or in the United States, had shown a genuine interest, concern, and care for the Maltese immigrants in Toronto and vicinity. These priests include: Fr. Anton Tabone S.J., Fr. Aurelius Catania, Fr. Fortunato Mizzi O.F.M. Cap., Fr. Giacomo Baldacchino O.F.M. Cap., Fr. Fulgentio Grech, O.F.M. Cap., Fr. Eugenio Fiteni, O.S.A., and Fr. Alphonse Cauchi, O.S.A., who eventually became the first pastor of St. Paul the Apostle Church in 1929. The visits of these priests had helped to sustain and foster in the Maltese both their Roman Catholic faith and their sense of identity and community.

The earliest documented interest in helping Maltese immigrants in Toronto is that of Fr. Aurelius Catania who in 1913, while serving in the Italian community at the Church of the Assumption in Daphne, Alabama,

¹⁵ See Attard, *Early Maltese Emigration (1900-1914)* and *The Great Exodus (1918-1939)*, and John D. Crawford, *Dr. Charles Mattei and Maltese Emigration to British Columbia 1912 and 1913* (Victoria, B.C.: 1992).

¹⁶ Attard, *Early Maltese Emigration*, 43.

¹⁷ See Attard, *Early Maltese Emigration* (Chapter 4), and Crawford, *Dr. Charles Mattei and Maltese Emigration*.

¹⁸ Dr. Charles Mattei was a Maltese medical doctor, who was involved in Maltese emigration to Australia, the United States, and Canada for about forty years. For some time he was Honorary Secretary of the Malta Emigration Committee. By 1912, when he encouraged the first official attempt to organise the emigration of a group of Maltese men to Canada, he had travelled to England (where he graduated as a medical doctor), Australia, and North America, and had served in South Africa during the Boer War. See Crawford, *Dr. Charles Mattei and Maltese Emigration*.

¹⁹ See Attard, *The Great Exodus*. Bishop Emard, at the time bishop of Valleyfield, Quebec, lead the Canadian clergy at the Congress.

wrote to the Chancery Office of the Archdiocese of Toronto offering to serve among the Maltese in Toronto.²⁰ Fr. Catania, who had been in the United States since 1909, eventually served the Maltese in Brantford, Ontario, where he was assistant pastor at St. Basil's Church between 1917 and 1920.²¹ The earliest record of a Maltese priest actually assisting the Maltese in Toronto is that of Fr. Tabone S.J., who for two years lived in Guelph, Ontario. He visited the Maltese in February 1914, and in June 1914 conducted a retreat for the Maltese in Toronto at St. Mary's Chapel at Bathurst and Adelaide Streets.²² The former occasion was documented in a rather moving letter written by a Maltese in Toronto who signed himself "C.M." and wrote to Archbishop McNeil on behalf of other Maltese in Toronto:

Monsinior Father I am Writin this few lines to let you know that We cant explain you the pleasure amongs ower self when for the first time We seen a Jesuit Malti for the First time in Toronto and We Had a Holy Service from Him and We Hop not Waiting for long and We Have a Father of ower Countryn in the city of Toronto. We Wish to Have Local one for the city and the Proivince of Ontario where is needed to be called. We in this city We have no society and no one to Aide as and no one Have buseness in this City al spred about and Have no place tell yet All other Nation Have society and buseness a position but as We need to Aide as and Priest to form society among as We trust in you Father We are Natives of Malta .²³

The Maltese, who were starting to compare themselves to other ethnic groups, felt the need to form a Society to help them with their religious and other needs as well as obtain recognition as a group. The author of this letter believed that this could not have been accomplished without the assistance of a Maltese priest.²⁴ Such a response seemed very natural,

²⁰ ARCAT, McNeil Papers, MNEC04.01.

²¹ Records of St. Basil's Church, Brantford, Ontario.

²² *Catholic Register*, Thursday 4 June 1914, p. 10, reel #17.

²³ ARCAT, McNeil Papers, 8 February 1914, MNEC04.02.

²⁴ Until 1916 the only recorded effort of the Maltese in Toronto to organize themselves as a group is the Maltese Branch of the Holy Name Society. See 1916 annual report, Holy Name Society Papers, ARCAT. (In comparison, as early as 1913 the Maltese in Winnipeg had formed an association, "The Maltese Protective Association." Among the 500 Maltese in Winnipeg, several were professionals, and this may account for the establishing of the Association. See Crawford, "Early Maltese Emigrants to the Canadian Prairies," *The Maltese Herald* (Australia), 24 March, 1992, 13.) However there are two other sources that indicate that the Maltese felt the need to have a Maltese priest. First, the already mentioned letter that Fr. A. Catania wrote to the Archbishop of Toronto on 8 April, 1913. Although he was living in Alabama he had heard that there were "many" Maltese in Toronto who needed a Maltese priest. Second, a

given that these men, who had no experience with urban life in Canada and most of whom did not speak English, must have been missing Maltese traditions and way of life. In early twentieth-century Malta, there was a very close connection between social and religious institutions. In many instances the two realms intersected. Many of the social and festive activities in both towns and villages revolved around religious life in the parishes.

In 1916 there were about 200 Maltese in Toronto.²⁵ The Maltese population in Toronto had decreased partly because several Maltese men were recruited to the military or returned to Malta. However, by 1917 the number increased to about 450.²⁶ Although the Maltese were scattered in several parts of the city, by 1918 the majority of them lived primarily in two locations. One group, who lived in the downtown area, frequented Mount Carmel Church or St. Patrick's Church; the other group, most of whom worked in factories in the west end of Toronto, lived in the Junction area and frequented St. Cecilia's Church on Annette Street. The baptismal and marriage records of St. Michael's Cathedral and St. Mary's Church on Bathurst and Adelaide Streets, indicate that a smaller group of Maltese lived in those downtown areas.²⁷

While most of the Maltese who came to Canada at this time were primarily young, single males from a working class background, there were also some formally educated Maltese, such as architects, who worked as professionals.²⁸ Others ran their own small businesses.²⁹ Soon, however, several of these men were joined by their spouses from Malta or married in Canada to Maltese women and in a few instances to women of other nationalities. Most of these couples had several children, and in some cases they encouraged relatives to join them and settle in Toronto.

document dated 5 February 1914, from the Toronto Office of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul containing the names and addresses of 98 Maltese men in Toronto (ARCAT, MNWL04.02). This document was sent to Fr. A. Tabone S.J., who had requested the names and addresses of Maltese men who had sought assistance from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. This indicates that Fr. Tabone was attempting to communicate with these men.

²⁵ Fr. Mizzi's Report to Archbishop McNeil, 3 July 1916. ARCAT, McNeil Papers, MNEC04.03.

²⁶ Fr. Mizzi to Fr. Eusebio O.F.M.Cap, Maltese Provincial, 1918, ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.

²⁷ ARCAT.

²⁸ Fr. Mizzi's 1916 Report to McNeil, ARCAT.

²⁹ Information obtained from interviews with Maltese-Canadians conducted by R. Cumbo (1978), Ontario Multicultural Historical Association, as well as interviews conducted by myself between 1997 and 2001.

Fr. Fortunato Mizzi O.F.M. Cap. was born in Valletta, Malta on 5 July 1880, the son of the lawyer Dr. Fortunato Mizzi, founder of the Nationalist Party in Malta, and Sophie Folliero de Luna, who was originally from France. He studied at the English Jesuit College in Malta, where he excelled in philosophy and the natural sciences. He commenced his novitiate with the Capuchins of Toulouse, France, on 8 December 1899, assuming his new name "Fortune." He took his first profession a year later, and on 8 December 1903 he made his solemn vows. After completing one year of philosophical studies in Toulouse, between 1902 and 1906 he studied theology in Toulouse and Spain. In 1903, when the Capuchins were expelled from France as a result of anticlericalism, he emigrated with them to Spain, where they were welcomed by the Archbishop of Burgos. He continued his theological studies at the Convent of St. Peter in Carderia, near Burgos, where in 1904 he was ordained subdeacon by the same Archbishop. He was ordained priest on 31 March 1906 at the age of twenty-six.³⁰

In October 1906, Fr. Mizzi came to Canada, where he lived in the Capuchin Monastery on Wellington Street in Ottawa where the Capuchins of Toulouse had been since 1890.³¹ According to Schiavone, Fr. Mizzi himself had "requested to go as missionary to Canada to work among Maltese and Italian immigrants."³² During his 29-year stay in Canada, primarily in Ottawa and for a while in Ristigouche, Fr. Mizzi assumed varied responsibilities. Besides teaching Mathematics and English at the Seraphic College (a Capuchin College) in Ottawa, he worked vigorously with the Italians in Ottawa and the Maltese in Toronto. Fr. Mizzi's work with immigrants dates at least from the spring of 1908, when he founded the Italian Mission of St. Anthony.³³ Initially the Italians of Ottawa were served at St. Francis Church and later at the chapel of St. Elizabeth on Murray Street.³⁴ In 1913 he founded and was the first pastor of the Italian

³⁰ Based on information from "Memoranda di Dr. Fortunato Mizzi" 1904, 39. MFA, Dr. Fortunato Mizzi papers, Valletta, Malta; and P. Justin O.F.M. Cap., "Le Rev. Père Fortune de La Valette, Capucin," *L'Echo de Saint-François*, 35, 10, Oct. 1945: 277-8

³¹ Fr. Mizzi was known to the Capuchins as Fr. Fortunato or Fr. Fortunatus di Valletta. He used either of these formats when he signed letters.

³² Michael J. Schiavone, "Mizzi, Fortunato" in Schiavone (ed.), *Maltese Biographies of the Twentieth Century* (Malta: PIN, 1997), 416.

³³ See "A Brief History of St. Anthony's Church" in the souvenir booklet (1988) for the 75th anniversary of the church. (ARCOA)

³⁴ Anselm Chiasson, *Paroisse Saint-François d'Assise d'Ottawa, 1890-1990* (Ottawa, 1990) 72.

National Parish of St. Anthony of Padua in Ottawa.³⁵ In 1914, at the request of Fr. Mizzi, the care of the parish was passed on to the Servites of Mary. Hardly had he given up the role of pastor, that he commenced his work with the Third Order of St. Francis. In the fall of 1914 he founded and directed the English Franciscan Third Order in Ottawa.³⁶ Between 1928 and 1934 he was Guardian of the Monastery of St. Francis of Assisi in Ottawa.³⁷

In 1935 the Capuchins in Ottawa became part of the Capuchin eastern province of Canada and also became an autonomous Capuchin province dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In that same year, Fr. Mizzi left Canada. The reason for his departure is not clear. According to Fr. Gabrielle Dextrase O.F.M. Cap., all the Capuchin priests from Toulouse had to make a choice whether or not to remain with the Province of Toulouse or join the Eastern Canada Province.³⁸ According to Fr. Justin, Fr. Mizzi, whose health was declining (including serious problems with his eyesight), was re-called to France by his superiors.³⁹ Shortly after his arrival he went to Corsica, where he founded and was director of the convent of St. Anthony in Bastia and where he taught at the Seraphic College.⁴⁰ He died in Moissac, France on 23 July 1945.⁴¹

³⁵ P. Justin, "Le Rev. Père Fortune de la Valette, Capucin," 277; Chiasson, *Paroisse Saint-François d'Assise d'Ottawa*; and "A Brief History of St. Anthony's Church" (ARCOA). According to Perin, "an Italian-born Capuchin ... supervised the building of the church of St. Anthony." (*The Immigrants' Church*, 13). This "Italian-born Capuchin" was in fact the Maltese-born Fr. Mizzi. Given that Fr. Mizzi was very fluent in Italian, he could have easily passed as an Italian.

³⁶ E.J. Collingwood, "The English-Speaking Third Order Fraternities in Ottawa 1914-1934," *The Third Order Bulletin* (special issue, Ottawa, 1934). 61 (MFA).

³⁷ P. Justin, "Le Rev. Père Fortune de la Valette, Capucin," p.278. For Franciscans, "Guardian" is equivalent to "Superior," that is, "the one who heads a house in a non-monastic institute." Michel Theriault, *Les instituts de vie consacrée au Canada depuis les débuts de la Nouvelle-France jusqu'à aujourd'hui/The Institutes of Consecrated Life in Canada from the Beginning of New France up to the Present* (Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1980), 34.

³⁸ Private communication from Fr. Dextrase, 21 May 1997.

³⁹ Justin, "Le Rev. Père Fortune de la Valette, Capucin," 278.

⁴⁰ Fr. Angelo Mizzi O.F.M. Cap. *Malta Missionaria e I Suoi Missionari* (Malta: The Empire Press, 1935) (3rd., revised ed.), 232.

⁴¹ Notwithstanding his pastoral work and teaching obligations, Fr. Mizzi was a prolific writer. His publications include a commentary on the *Book of Revelation* (University of Ottawa, 1939), *Le Christ Roi: Triumphe de l'Eglise et Conversion* (Carcassonne, France: Editions de l'Enclume, 1938), *La Clausola*



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56 (Malta, 1923), and *Lotta e Vittoria della Nazionalita' Franco-Canadese* (Malta, 1928). He also authored several unpublished essays and lengthy reflections in French and English on a variety of topics such as Franciscan spirituality and way of life, heroism, and Maltese missions (Available at ACM).

Fr. Mizzi first learned about the needs of the Maltese in Toronto and vicinity from Fr. Tabone, who had informed him that since the Maltese were scattered in the city and could not speak English, they were “exposed to a thousand dangers for their souls.”⁴² Fr. Tabone, who had come to the conclusion that the Maltese needed the assistance of a Maltese priest and who left Canada in 1915, encouraged Fr. Mizzi to pursue work with the Maltese in Toronto.

On 10 June 1916 Fr. Mizzi, in a letter to Archbishop N. McNeil of Toronto, asked for permission to “for some days, ... preach the Maltese under [his] jurisdiction and hear their confessions, in the churches, placed at my disposal.”⁴³ He also enclosed a letter of recommendation from Mons. P.F. Stagni, Apostolic Delegate of Canada, who had already approved of Fr. Mizzi’s intention to work with the Maltese in Canada. Archbishop McNeil, who had already known of the Maltese in his diocese from information given to him by Fr. Tabone and other priests, responded very promptly and positively. He fully supported Fr. Mizzi’s request and invited him to “make [his] home here with [him] while in Toronto.”⁴⁴ According to Fr. Mizzi, the Archbishop had formed a positive impression of the Maltese.⁴⁵

Later that month Fr. Mizzi visited Toronto and attended to the spiritual needs of the Maltese. He heard the confessions of 150 Maltese. The Maltese were delighted to have a priest who spoke their language visit them. He also met with the Maltese as a group and discussed the subject of raising money to support a Maltese priest among them. They agreed to contribute \$600.00 per year to support a Maltese pastor.⁴⁶ In the meeting he had with Archbishop McNeil, Fr. Mizzi was asked to submit a report about the Maltese in Toronto. Fr. Mizzi took this matter very seriously and acted promptly.⁴⁷

⁴² Quoted in Fr. Mizzi’s letter of 25 December 1916 to Archbishop M. Caruana O.S.B., ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.24.

⁴³ ARCAT, McNeil Papers, MNAHOS.61.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Fr. Mizzi’s letter of 25 December, 1916 to Bishop Caruana, ACM, H53.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Fr. Mizzi’s report to McNeil, 1916. ARCAT.

⁴⁷ The report dated 3 July 1916 was written at 141 McCaul Street, Toronto, the address of St. Patrick’s Church. According to the Chronicles of this church, Fr. Mizzi was a guest of the Redemptorists at St. Patrick’s from 26 June to 7 July 1916, when he departed for Montreal. (*Chronicles of St. Patrick’s Church 1912-1922*, ART).

The five-page foolscap hand-written Report, "Memorandum on the Maltese Immigration to Toronto," is in eight sections. The first five sections offer statistics and a description of the social background of the Maltese in Toronto, a description of their religious background and habits, and the effects on their religious faith and practices of living in a large city far from their homeland without a Maltese priest among them. The remaining three sections offer suggestions and an evaluation of them.

The detail and care with which this report was written clearly showed that Fr. Mizzi had done a thorough assessment of the Maltese in Toronto, their context, and their needs. From the 200 Maltese he identified, eighty of them were living in West Toronto, seventy were in the vicinity of Mount Carmel Church in downtown, and the rest were in other parts of Toronto. Although most of these were single Maltese men, he identified fourteen families and twenty seven children. He noted that although in 1913 several of them were unemployed, in 1916 they were doing well. The employments mentioned include architects, electricians, carpenters, stone-cutters, builders and labourers. Some women were hired for sewing. Overall, Fr. Mizzi observed that the Maltese were doing well, and most of them would send home to Malta between \$25 and \$30 per month. According to reports Fr. Mizzi had about the Maltese, the Maltese were regarded as "excellent" Catholics and "labourers."

Apart from the interesting details about the conditions of the Maltese in Toronto, the Report revealed several important facts. First, that the Maltese away from their homeland had not abandoned their faith. On the contrary, although most of them were blue collar workers, who were expected to send money to their relatives in Malta, in Fr. Mizzi's own words, "they never missed mass merely in order to avoid to pay their dues." They were also willing to contribute toward the expenses that would be incurred to have a Maltese pastor in Toronto. Moreover, Mr. Azzopardi, a Maltese immigrant, had collected \$300.00 from the Maltese in Toronto for the diocesan seminary. Notwithstanding the language barriers, some of the Maltese attended the sacrament of penance through the use of an interpreter. Fr. Mizzi was of the opinion that once the Maltese had decided to settle in Canada, they would learn English. But this, according to him, would take up to five years, during which time he was afraid that more would become indifferent toward their faith. In fact, he observed that some had not "approached the sacraments for three years, and more than one-third for fourteen months, since Fr. Tabone S.J. came ... There is one case of marriage of a Maltese man and Protestant woman before a Protestant minister." The language barrier was a very serious one. As Fr. Mizzi noted: "How pleased were they to meet a priest

of their language! It was ‘as if they met their fathers and mothers,’ to use their own expression.”⁴⁸ Hence his conclusion that it was imperative that the Maltese have a Maltese priest among them.

Fr. Mizzi was very aware of the practical difficulties that had to be resolved for his project to materialize. While his report provided a rather strong argument for his conclusion, he offered three suggestions to Archbishop McNeil. First, that a Maltese priest be appointed as curate of an already existing parish. Second, that a Maltese priest be appointed as chaplain to a community of sisters. Third, that a Maltese priest be appointed as rector of an English-Maltese parish. While admitting that each proposal had some limitations, Fr. Mizzi favoured the second one for a while until the third option became feasible. His suggestions and preferences indicate that he was not simply taking into account financial considerations. He understood that the limited number of Maltese in Toronto were not sufficient to justify an independent Maltese parish at that time. The Maltese in the downtown area were attending primarily Mount Carmel Church, which as of 1908 had been an Italian parish. The Maltese in the Junction were attending St. Cecilia’s Church, which was a predominantly English-speaking parish. Since Fr. Mizzi favoured the third option, perhaps he had in mind that the Maltese priest would associate himself with the latter parish rather than former one. Given his Italian sympathies, sympathies which were no doubt developed from his family’s association with the Nationalist Party in Malta, his preference for the third option showed that Fr. Mizzi had not fallen into the trap of partisan politics. He had seriously analyzed the Canadian context in Toronto and concluded that the Maltese needed to learn English to do well in Canada. While acknowledging the importance of acquiring the language of power, one is still left wondering whether Fr. Mizzi thought about what impact this may have on the Maltese community should Maltese be lost among the Maltese in Toronto. Could this be a detriment to their sense of community and identity? There is no indication in the documentation available whether or not this issue was raised or considered at all by Fr. Mizzi.

Not unlike the situation of other national parishes in Toronto, the success of Fr. Mizzi’s project hinged on several circumstances beyond his control.⁴⁹ The number of Maltese in Toronto and elsewhere in Canada

⁴⁸All the quotes in this paragraph are from Fr. Mizzi’s Report to Archbishop McNeil. ARCAT, McNeil Papers.

⁴⁹ For information about national parishes in Toronto, see, for example, Zucchi, “Church, Clergy, and Religious Life,” Sharodi, “The Experience of Polish Catholics in the Archdioceses of Toronto 1905-1935,” and Mark

had decreased between 1913 and 1916. Some had returned to Malta due to unemployment or problems adjusting in Canada; others were serving overseas in the war. And as a result of the war, immigration had come to a halt. As early as 1914 or 1915 there existed a Maltese Branch of the Holy Name Union. But the annual report of the Union for 1916, with the exception of Mount Carmel Church Branch and the Syrian Branch, gave a rather sad state of the non-English speaking branches. The report encouraged and reminded the members of their obligation to assist and support non-English speaking groups, this support being deemed necessary to discourage immigrants from abandoning their faith. With regard to the Maltese Branch, the report documented: “practically non-existent, majority of men returned to their Island home.”⁵⁰ The fact that the Maltese population in Toronto declined and the Maltese were not located only in one major area of the city made it more difficult for the Maltese to meet as one group. The Maltese, following the tradition in Malta, preferred to attend mass at the nearest church to where they lived.⁵¹ This made it more difficult for them to contribute financially on a weekly basis in support of their own priest and church.

Another factor was the response or support from the Bishop of Malta. The only records available indicate that there was one communication between Fr. Mizzi and the Bishop of Malta. On Christmas day 1916, Fr. Mizzi wrote a rather lengthy letter in Italian to Bishop Mauro Caruana O.S.M. and included a copy of the report he had submitted to Archbishop McNeil.⁵² In this letter he provided Bishop Caruana with a summary of the situation of the Maltese in Canada, particularly those in Toronto, and once again made a strong plea to have a Maltese priest among the Maltese immigrants in Canada: “Allow me, your Excellency, to stress the need of a Maltese priest for our countrymen in Canada. It is necessary to have a missionary ... a Maltese priest [who] would be at the same time both knowledgeable and humble; knowledgeable in his capacity as professor; humble in his capacity as pastor because it would befall such a person to visit certain houses of labourers who require a delicate

McGowan, in *The Waning of the Green: Catholics, the Irish and Identity in Toronto, 1887-1922* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999).

⁵⁰ ARCAT, Holy Name Society Papers, Annual Report, 1916, 0C14,RE01.

⁵¹ Fr. Mizzi to Rev. Fr. Eusebio O.F.M.Cap., Provincial of the Province of Malta, 12 February 1918. ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.24.

⁵² ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.24

nature.”⁵³ He also included other information related to the establishment of a mission for the Maltese in Canada.

First, we learn that Archbishop McNeil, as expected, had received him very cordially. It is not clear whether this meeting occurred prior to Fr. Mizzi’s submission of his report. But it is interesting that he informed Bishop Caruana that “after an exchange of ideas [with McNeil], he [the Archbishop] came to the conclusion to ask your Excellency a capable priest to fulfill the double duty of professor (that is at the Seminary of Toronto) and pastor of the Maltese.”⁵⁴ This proposal was different from any of the ones suggested by Fr. Mizzi in his report to McNeil earlier that year, and it introduced the academic qualifications necessary for the Maltese priest to work in Toronto. At that time, given the circumstances, Fr. Mizzi agreed with the Archbishop that this would be the “wisest solution, because such a Maltese priest would at the same time be knowledgeable and humble.” However this raised the issue of whether there would be such a qualified Maltese priest willing to come to Canada after he was granted permission to do so by the Bishop of Malta. There is no available documentation as to whether the Bishop of Malta agreed with such a proposal or whether there was any communication between the two prelates.

Although faced by rather daunting circumstances, Fr. Mizzi pursued the matter further. By December 1916, he had written an article about emigration to Canada which he sent to his brother, Dr. Giuseppe Mizzi, editor of the newspaper *Malta*, the pro-Nationalist newspaper in Malta published in Italian. This article included information about employment in Canada which would have been of interest to the Maltese if they decided to come to Canada. The publication of such an article may have encouraged more Maltese to emigrate to Canada as well as inspired a Maltese priest to seek permission to come to work with Maltese immigrants in Canada.

In the letter to Bishop Caruana, Fr. Mizzi again mentioned that the Maltese had to confess with the aid of an interpreter. In order for the Maltese to avoid the use of an interpreter, he suggested the publication of a Latin-Maltese questionnaire for the purpose of confessing. This leaflet would contain three columns: one with the questions in Latin; another with the Maltese translations; and the third with the Latin

⁵³ Translation from letter in Italian to Bishop Caruana, 1916, ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.24.

⁵⁴ Fr. Mizzi’s Report to Archbishop McNeil. This is a proposal which was also made in the late 1920s when Fr. Alofonse Cauchi O.S.A., D.D. showed that he was willing to come to Toronto to work with the Maltese in the city.

pronunciation of the Maltese words.⁵⁵ On the matter of confessing with an interpreter, three of the older Maltese in Toronto I interviewed recall their parents confessing with the aid of an interpreter.⁵⁶ According to these accounts, the interpreter, who understood both Maltese and English or Italian, would be in the same room as the priest and the penitent but facing the wall so as not to be able to see either the priest or the other person. The priest would slowly recite the commandments in English or Italian and the interpreter would translate each commandment into Maltese. The penitent, who would hold the priest's hand, would squeeze it once if the reply was in the affirmative, and twice if it was in the negative. While this method secured confidentiality, Fr. Mizzi's suggestion would have altogether eliminated the need of an interpreter.

The most curious piece of information in this letter is the fact that Fr. Mizzi kindly advised the Bishop of Malta that the best suggestion was to "establish in Canada a branch of a province of a religious order, already existing in Malta, and suggest[ed] Hamilton, in Ontario, as the appropriate city for such a foundation."⁵⁷ And thus we have a fifth option, which was neither mentioned in Fr. Mizzi's report nor in the document referring to Archbishop McNeil's conclusion. Fr. Mizzi came up with this possibility after he had visited Hamilton, where he must have gone after having met with Archbishop McNeil as well as after having written the report in July 1916. For otherwise what explanation should one give for him not mentioning this possibility earlier?⁵⁸

In this same letter to Bishop Caruana he noted that Fr. Tabone S.J. had suggested to his excellency of sending Maltese religious to three convents in Canada: a Dominican to Montreal, a Carmelite to Niagara Falls and a Franciscan to Edmonton. Fr. Tabone's original idea was that each of these priests would assist the Maltese in their region or areas by

⁵⁵ Yet another thoughtful suggestion to alleviate difficulties for the Maltese and to assist them in frequenting the sacraments.

⁵⁶ Interviews conducted in 1997 and 2001.

⁵⁷ Translation from letter to bishop Caruana, 1916, ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.24.

⁵⁸ It may be that Fr. Mizzi visited Hamilton on another occasion. By early October 1916, he had visited the Maltese in Brantford, Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Calgary, Vancouver, and Victoria. See, letter, dated 5 October 1916, to his cousin Mr. Alfonso Galea, K.C., Sliema, Malta (ACM, Mizzi Papers H53.24) There were no Maltese in Hamilton at that time. According to P. Justin, Fr. Mizzi made two "apostolic voyages" throughout Canada including Vancouver, through the financial aid of Mons. Stagni, the Apostolic Delegate, and Sir Charles Fitzpatrick, Minister of Justice in Ottawa. See "Le Rev. Père Fortune de la Valette, Capucin."

visiting them regularly while also attending to work in their respective convents. Fr. Mizzi thought that this proposal was not feasible since it would have placed the Maltese religious in the “delicate situation ... of belonging to a province that is not appropriate, and under superiors of other mentality.”⁵⁹ It was in response to this proposal that he humbly suggested Hamilton as an alternative. He explained that during his brief visit to Hamilton, the Vicar General, who had invited Fr. Mizzi to a tour of the city, brought to his attention the cemetery close to which there was a country-house for the priests in the Bishop’s office. He also told him that “a priest who would like to retire and take care of the cemetery would have a yearly income of \$1200.00 (about 240 sterling).”⁶⁰ The Vicar also agreed that this work would be suitable for a religious community. Hence Fr. Mizzi proposed to Bishop Caruana to encourage a Maltese religious community to found a convent on this site. This would have allowed the Maltese priests to visit the Maltese in Toronto, Detroit,⁶¹ London, Berlin, Brantford, St. Catharines, and Montreal – a total of about 600 people, according to Fr. Mizzi’s estimations. This would have also been a financially feasible solution, for besides the secured income from attending the cemetery, there would have been some other income from performing other duties.

Each of these five different proposals aimed at assisting the Maltese in Canada had one common element: that the Maltese priest or priests would be doing some other kind of work besides the pastoral care of the Maltese since the Maltese were unable financially to support fully a priest in Canada. Moreover, for any of these proposals to materialize full support was needed from both the religious authorities in Malta and Canada, and a Maltese priest had to be willing to dedicate his life to attending to the needs of Maltese immigrants in Canada. The good intentions and wishes of the Maltese and the hard work of Fr. Mizzi alone were not enough. Undoubtedly, Fr. Mizzi took the matter very seriously as can be seen from the correspondence he undertook between 1916 and 1920. As for the support from the Bishops, Archbishop McNeil supported the project.⁶² This is not surprising given the support he had

⁵⁹ Translation from letter to Bishop Caruna. ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.24.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ The Maltese in Detroit had been attempting to get a Maltese priest among them. Fr. Michael Borg was appointed the first pastor of the Maltese ethnic parish in Detroit. He arrived in Detroit from Malta in December 1920. See Attard, *The Great Exodus (1918-1939)*, 42-4.

⁶² In this regard it is worthwhile noting that Fr. Aurelius Catania had expressed an interest to work in Toronto as early as April 1913 (See, letter to Rev. J.T. Kidd, ARCAT, McNeil Papers, MNEC04.01) . In June 1917 Fr.

shown other immigrant groups. Although we do not have any direct evidence that Bishop Caruana supported the project, given the permission he granted to other Maltese priests to assist the Maltese elsewhere (for example, New York and Detroit)⁶³ and given his earlier work as private secretary to Mons. Ambrogio Agius, Apostolic Delegate for the Philippines,⁶⁴ one would have expected the Bishop to support this project.

The other issue that remained was the willingness of an appropriate Maltese priest to undertake such an onerous task. On 7 October 1917, Fr. Fulgentio Grech O.F.M. Cap.,⁶⁵ who belonged to the province of Malta, wrote to Fr. Mizzi about the need of a Maltese priest to work with Maltese immigrants in Canada. Fr. Grech was inspired to write as a result of having read Fr. Mizzi's report in the newspaper *Malta* in which he wrote about the missions he had conducted for the Maltese in Detroit, Chicago, and elsewhere. Fr. Grech had also met some Maltese immigrants from Detroit while they were visiting their relatives in Malta. According to Fr. Grech, these people really desired to have a Maltese priest among them. So he wrote to Fr. Mizzi to seek his advice about his own wish to come to North America to attend to the religious needs of the Maltese immigrants. He also asked him to give him details about the necessary steps he would have to take should he advise him to pursue his interest in this matter.

Fr. Mizzi replied promptly. In his letter of 8 November 1917, while expressing his delight that Fr. Grech was interested in his proposed project, he reminded him that two more men – a priest and a lay brother – would be needed for the Capuchins of Malta to establish a community

Catania wrote to Mons. Martin D. Whelan, Vicar General, and again reiterated his interest. He noted that he was writing in response to the Archbishop's attempt to get a Maltese priest to Toronto and because no Maltese priest seemed willing to volunteer himself for this work (McNeil Papers, ARCAT). Fr. Catania, who in 1917 was still working in Alabama, might have heard about McNeil's aim from the Maltese newspapers.

⁶³ See Attard, *The Great Exodus*. However, the permission for Fr. Baldacchino O.F.M. Cap. to work in New York and for Fr. Michael Borg to work in Detroit came later, that is, in 1919 and 1920 respectively. The case of the Maltese in Canada may have been the first one Bishop Caruana had to deal with following his installation as bishop in 1915.

⁶⁴ Robert Mifsud Bonnici, *Dizzjunarju Bijo-bibliografiku Nazzjonali* (Malta: Department of Information, 1960), 107-8.

⁶⁵ Mizzi Papers, ACM. Fr. Grech (1884-1968) who was born in Tunis, the son of Maltese immigrants, joined the Capuchin Order in Malta in 1904, and was ordained priest in 1912. He spoke Maltese, Italian, English, and French.

in Hamilton.⁶⁶ Fr. Mizzi was concerned that there was no response to Bishop Caruana's appeal in his Bulletin, for any Maltese religious order to establish a community in Hamilton. In his usual style, he offered careful advice with regard to procedures Fr. Grech had to follow and permissions he needed to obtain. Besides letters from Fr. Grech's provincial general and the Bishops of Malta and Hamilton, he also suggested that a letter from Cardinal De Lai in Rome who, according to Fr. Mizzi, was greatly interested in immigrants, would greatly help his cause.⁶⁷ Fr. Mizzi also agreed to visit the Maltese in order to inform them of this project and inquire whether they would guarantee an annual donation of \$2 to \$5 per family in support of the priest's expenses for their visits. Given the unpredictable effects of the war, he concluded by urging Fr. Grech to act promptly on this matter.

On the suggestion of Fr. Grech in his letter of 23 December 1917, Fr. Mizzi communicated directly with Fr. Eusebio O.F.M. Cap, the Provincial of the Maltese Capuchin Province, about this project.⁶⁸ On 12 February 1918 Fr. Mizzi wrote a 42-page letter to Fr. Eusebio.⁶⁹ While he included a copy of his 1916 report to Archbishop McNeil and his letter to Bishop Caruna, Fr. Mizzi offered detailed calculations and statistics with regard to the possible income and expenses to run a Maltese mission with three Maltese Capuchins living in Hamilton.⁷⁰

While Fr. Mizzi attempted to give a very detailed picture of the context and conditions in Canada, he encouraged the Provincial to visit Toronto once he had the proper recommendations in hand, so he could see for himself and speak with the Archbishop of Toronto, who, according to Fr. Mizzi, based on information he obtained from other priests, was sympathetic to religious orders. Although Fr. Mizzi did not paint a totally negative picture of the situation, he informed the Provincial that first, Bishops, in general, did not favour religious orders and offered little financial support; second, that the Maltese in Toronto were dispersed throughout the city and it was difficult to gather them in one church; third, that it was uncertain whether the number of Maltese in

⁶⁶ ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.

⁶⁷ In this letter we learn that Cardinal De Lai had sent Fr. Mizzi a congratulatory letter for the work he was doing for the Italians in Ottawa.

⁶⁸ ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.

⁶⁹ ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.

⁷⁰ His calculations were based on information he obtained from a superior of a community in Ottawa, as well as information on the cost of living from "La Gazette du Travail" and a Canadian government report (1911-16).

Canada would increase; and fourth, that the conditions in Canada after the war were unpredictable.

On 20 May 1918, shortly after having returned from Toronto where he administered to the religious needs of the Maltese, Fr. Mizzi wrote again to Fr. Eusebio to inform him that as a result of an obligatory levy, the number of Maltese in Toronto had decreased, and that the Vicar General of Hamilton, who had supported the idea of the Capuchins to take care of the cemetery in Hamilton, had died on 9 May.⁷¹

Fr. Eusebio never managed to visit Canada. He suggested that Fr. Mizzi himself do all the preparatory work needed for negotiating the establishment of a Maltese Capuchin Mission.⁷² Fr. Mizzi was willing to do this work once he had received from Fr. Eusebio his written authorization to act on his behalf as well as copies of letters of recommendation from some authority in Rome. It seemed that Fr. Mizzi never received such documentation for as Fr. Eusebio informed him, the General of the Capuchins in Rome was not enthusiastic about this project. While he agreed to think about the matter further, the General argued that “there is no need to distance ourselves too much for a mission.”⁷³ Notwithstanding Fr. Eusebio’s further attempts to obtain support from the General in Rome, such permission was never granted.⁷⁴

By the end of 1919, Fr. Grech seemed to have lost hope about the project. But he still desired to work in Canada as a missionary. In December 1919 he asked Fr. Mizzi to ask his superior in Ottawa whether he would be accepted to work with them in Ottawa.⁷⁵ As a result of Fr. Mizzi’s intervention, in 1922 Fr. Grech came to Canada. For the next two years he travelled from Ottawa to Toronto and Detroit where he conducted missions for the Maltese. In Toronto, he was also very instrumental to the founding of the Maltese Canadian Society of Toronto.⁷⁶

From the above account of the work Fr. Mizzi was involved in between 1916 and 1922, one can conclude that he contributed in a variety of ways to the development of the Maltese community in Toronto. First,

⁷¹ ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.

⁷² Fr. Eusebio to Fr. Mizzi, 5 June 1918. ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.

⁷³ Fr. Eusebio to Fr. Mizzi, 19 July 1919. ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.

⁷⁴ Fr. Eusebio to Fr. Mizzi, 1 January 1920. ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.

⁷⁵ Fr. Grech to Fr. Mizzi, 15 December 1919. ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.

⁷⁶ Comments by Mr. Debatisse, co-founder of the Society, at the 40th anniversary celebrations of the Maltese-Canadian Society of Toronto. Audio tape, MCST Papers, NAC.

without any doubt, Fr. Mizzi was genuinely concerned about the spiritual needs of the Maltese immigrants. He took care of such needs by visiting the community in Toronto at least on a yearly basis notwithstanding his duties and obligations as a member of the Capuchin community in Ottawa. Like other ethnic groups in Toronto, the Maltese sought “personnel catering specifically to their ethnic group.”⁷⁷ Fr. Mizzi understood the importance of the presence of a Maltese priest among the Maltese whose daily lives in the motherland revolved around religious beliefs, practices, and traditions. He was truly concerned about the possibility of the Maltese losing or diminishing the fervour for their faith, given the foreign and overwhelming environment they found themselves in a large city. As Mark McGowan concluded: “The distinctive immigrant neighbourhood of Toronto’s southern and western districts were by no means safe havens for preserving the religious traditions of Catholic newcomers.”⁷⁸ Although there is no evidence of the Protestants luring the Maltese, Fr. Mizzi on a couple of occasions articulated the possible dangers leading to the Maltese abandoning their faith. In the 1916 Memorandum to Archbishop McNeil he wrote:

Up to now, thanks God, the Maltese have not fallen into all these excesses [’playing for money, fighting, drinking, bad conversations, and evil deeds, and last but not least, separation from one’s wife’]; but is it humanly possible to expect that they will resist for a long period of years all the temptations and occasions of sin which actually surround them, whilst there is scarcely anything to check their passions? – It is impossible! And in making this statement, I am taking into account the character of the Maltese. They will certainly lose their good habits and good dispositions, if they keep away from the Sacraments for some length of time.⁷⁹

Although Fr. Mizzi did not realize his dream of establishing a Maltese Mission in Toronto, his efforts laid the foundation for the establishment of the Maltese National Parish in 1929. His efforts included communications with Bishops and the Capuchins of the province of Malta, his continuous insistence of the need of the presence of a Maltese priest in Toronto, and his visits to Toronto which could be argued encouraged the Maltese to keep their zeal for their faith. Besides the fact that he brought the presence and needs of the Maltese to the attention of the Archbishop of Toronto, his efforts to assist Capuchins

⁷⁷ Perin, *The Immigrants’ Church*, 2.

⁷⁸ McGowan, “Toronto’s English-Speaking Catholics, Immigration, and the Making of a Canadian Catholic Identity, 1900-30,” 213.

⁷⁹ ARCAT, McNeil Papers, MNEC04.03.

from the Maltese Province to come to Canada, eventually lead to the two-year stay in Canada of Fr. Fulgentio Grech O.F.M. Cap. The latter was an important feat, for Fr. Grech, while also living in Ottawa, visited the Maltese in Toronto on several occasions and conducted missions for them. Moreover, it was Fr. Grech himself who encouraged a group of Maltese men to found a society which eventually became known as the Maltese Canadian Society of Toronto and which was influential in making the case with Archbishop McNeil to assist Fr. Cauchi in becoming the first pastor of the Maltese National Parish.⁸⁰ The contribution of the members of the Society, which organized social activities and assisted in the celebration of Maltese religious feasts, was vital to the actual building and furnishing of St. Paul the Apostle Church.

One could argue that the entire process which Fr. Mizzi initiated in 1916 served a crucial unifying purpose for the Maltese community in Toronto as its numbers fluctuated. As John Zucchi stated, national parishes “were the focus of many activities which can be divided into two main spheres – the religious and devotional on the one side and the social and patriotic on the other.”⁸¹ During the period Fr. Mizzi worked with and for the Maltese in Toronto, the Maltese did not have a national parish to enable them to fulfil such purposes. However, one could argue that Fr. Mizzi’s presence in Toronto and his continuous attempts to gather the Maltese as one group whenever he visited Toronto assisted the Maltese in achieving such aims. Given his publications in the newspaper *Malta* about conditions in Canada and prospects of Maltese who desired to settle in Canada, and his concern about the political situation in Malta⁸² should be sufficient to indicate his sense of Maltese identity which, one expects, would have influenced the nature of his dealings with the Maltese in Toronto. Although he was living in Ottawa, he was known among the Maltese in Canada and Malta. Some Maltese even wrote to him to assist them in recovering landed immigrant status after they had lived in Malta, for family reasons, for more than six months.⁸³ He took up their requests very seriously as indicated by the letters he wrote to Canadian Immigration authorities on behalf of the Maltese.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Comments by Mr. Debatiste at the 40th anniversary celebration of the Maltese-Canadian Society of Toronto, 1962. Audio tape, MCST Papers, NAC.

⁸¹ John E. Zucchi, *Italians in Toronto: Development of a National Identity, 1875-1935* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 1988), 134.

⁸² Particularly his concern about the need to establish a political national association open to members from any political party and the clergy.

⁸³ ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.

⁸⁴ ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.

Fr. Mizzi had conceived of two other projects which could have helped the growth of the Maltese community in Canada had they been realized. After having obtained detailed information from the Agricultural Institute in Oka about farming in Canada, in November 1916 he wrote to his brother Giuseppe, editor of *Malta*, outlining a possible plan to establish “a Maltese colony in Canada of horticulturalists” with the support of “Maltese capitalists”.⁸⁵ On the basis of “cooperative and philanthropic work,” while the business people would make “legitimate profit” from the venture, the Maltese would be employed on this farm and be able to have a Maltese priest. The second project would have involved the emigration of Maltese orphans to Canada as part of the venture by the Catholic Emigration Association to get Catholic orphans to Canada.⁸⁶ After communicating with the secretary of the Association in England⁸⁷ and obtaining detailed information from the Association, on 5 October 1916 he wrote about this project to his cousin Mr. Alfonso Galea K.C., a renowned Maltese philanthropist and author who assisted the Salesian Fathers to establish an industrial school in Malta for orphan boys. Although these two projects did not materialize, they once again indicate Fr. Mizzi’s fervent interest in Maltese immigrants to Canada and his efforts to assist them. It is interesting that these two projects were proposed after he had completed a Canada-wide tour where he brought “spiritual help and comfort to the (male) Maltese of Brantford, Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Calgary, Vancouver, and Victoria.”⁸⁸

In brief, one could reasonably conclude that Fr. Mizzi understood that the presence of a Maltese priest in Toronto would assist the Maltese in their religious needs which, in turn, would be “vital to their collective well-being.”⁸⁹ Moreover, Fr. Mizzi’s work and his vision of a Maltese mission eventually contributed to making the Maltese Catholics part of the “third block” or “third force” of Canadian Catholics.

⁸⁵ ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.

⁸⁶ For the work of this association see, Frederick J. McEvoy, “‘These Treasures of the Church of God’: Catholic Child Immigration to Canada,” *CCHA, Historical Studies*, 65 (1999), 50-70.

⁸⁷ Letter to Rev. George V. Hudson, 11 September 1916. ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.

⁸⁸ Letter to A. Galea, 1916, ACM, Mizzi Papers, H53.

⁸⁹ Perin, *The Immigrants’ Church*, 5.