

# New President of the Eden Foundation (Malta)

Ariadne Massa

*From the Times of Malta; photo by Darrin Zammit Lupi*

**B**ro. Martin Borg, Brother Provincial of the Freres, will be taking over the helm of the Eden Foundation from Josie Muscat who is venturing back into politics.

Dr Muscat, founder of Eden and the chairman of the St James Hospital Group, had entered the political fray in 1966 in the interests of the Nationalist Party, eventually withdrawing 20 years later to focus on his medical practice.

However, at 62, he is now planning to return with a vengeance and, rather than joining an existent political party, he is getting organised to set up his own.

As a result, Dr Muscat has had to step down from his post as president of Eden – a non-profit charity he set up 14 years ago to help persons with disabilities – since politics are not compatible with the foundation's statute.

Bro. Martin, who is also director of the De La Salle Brothers' Schools in Malta, will now be taking over the reins and continuing on Dr Muscat's dreams.

Dr Muscat was not present during a press conference yesterday to announce the changeover, because the board of trustees felt it was "not appropriate" for him to be there.

"There's nobody quite like Josie, the man who started all this. He's unique; a man whose vision has no limits. He left his heart with Eden and assured us his constant support," Bro. Martin said making his first address.

"It is not easy to follow in his footsteps. All I can say is that Josie had a lot of goals on his books that have not yet materialised, so we'll focus to make them happen," he added.

In his usual jovial self, Bro. Martin said he had no clue why he was chosen for the job and he initially thought it was a joke. Luckily, he had a retreat at the time, which gave him some moments to gather his thoughts in prayer to decide. Delving into the work of Eden, he spoke about the wrong assumption among a lot of people that the foundation was a privately-owned business, confused with the medical services provided by St James Hospital.

"Josie is a successful doctor who clearly understood that living was equally about giving. Eden represented his generous and altruistic side to his many faceted personality," Bro. Martin said.

He said that, at present, the goal was to put Eden in a position to provide the state its assistance in offering a better education to an extended number of intellectually disabled people - about 2,000 in Malta and Gozo - to facilitate their independence.

The foundation has been successful in training 100 individuals in finding employment and another 38 were undergoing training.

If Eden was able to source further financial assistance from the government, the foundation would be happy to do even more without having to expect a fee from the already suffering parents. "But, and I am afraid there is a big hesitation here, until such a time that an agreement can be made and a way forward established, we need to ensure the foundation keeps going," he said.

At the moment, Eden has 343 students, with another 50 on the waiting list.

"The perception that Eden has been widely successful financially is untrue. It has recently launched a very open and honest campaign, SOS Eden, to the public, explaining that the programmes Eden delivers to its children cost a daily deficit of over Lm500," Bro. Martin pointed out.

He insisted on the importance of collaboration with other entities in related spheres.

"We are looking to collaborate rather than compete with the state's educational system, the Equal Partners' Foundation, Razzett tal-Hbiberija, the Down's Syndrome Association and Special Olympics Malta. Our strength lies in coming together with one aim," he insisted.

As a side note, he referred to the SOS Eden booklet that will be distributed to every household in the coming days on gift ideas with a difference. All the booklets were printed and will be distributed with the help of sponsors.

