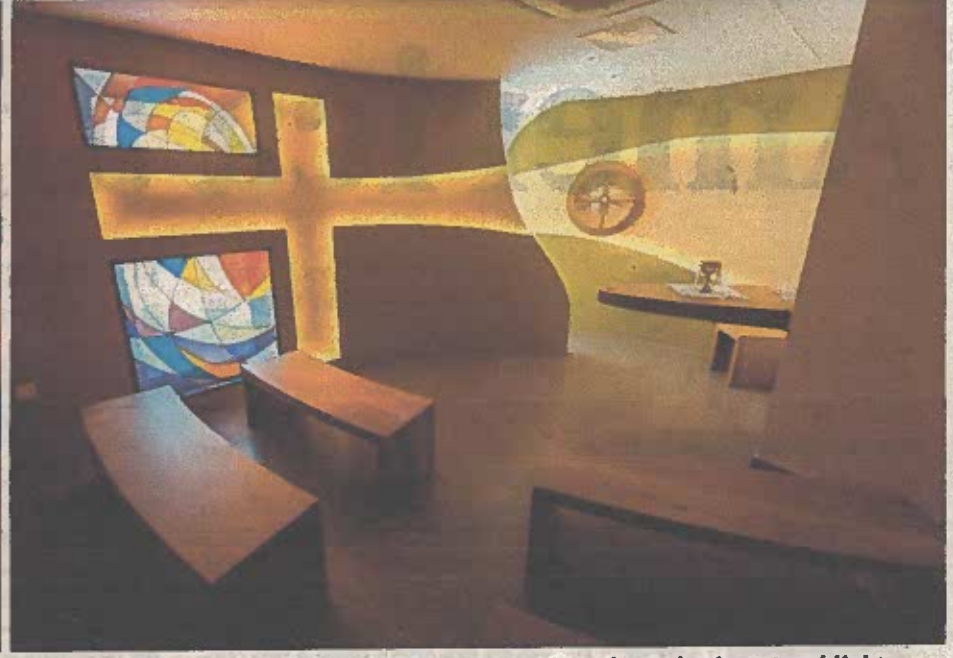


FEATURE



Artist Anthony Patrick Vella (second from right) explaining the concept behind the design of the chapel to Fr Victor Agius (left) and Cardinal Luis Tagle who inaugurated the chapel. PHOTO COURTESY OF NEWSBOOK



The chapel's artwork is interrupted by a space in order to let in natural light. Then the curve continues guiding the viewer's eye towards the tabernacle. PHOTO: LORELLA CASTILLO

A new chapel capturing the heart of a missionary journey

MARIA BONNICI

Missio Malta has recently unveiled a beautifully designed chapel, offering a tranquil sanctuary for worship, meditation and spiritual reflection.

This new space, nestled within the Missio complex, in Mosta was thoughtfully crafted for the agency's staff, volunteers and visitors. The design was entrusted to Maltese artist Anthony Patrick Vella, renowned for his expertise in blending traditional and modern architecture, especially in sacred spaces.

Vella's portfolio includes work across a variety of settings, from hotels to home interiors, but his focus on spiritual spaces shines through in this latest endeavour for Missio Malta, the Catholic Church's missionary arm on the island.

A MISSIONARY JOURNEY IN DESIGN

The concept for the chapel was inspired by the missionary journey itself, reflecting the deep spiritual and emotional path of those called to service.

The idea for the project began with a call from Fr Victor Agius, director of Missio Malta, who envisioned an adoration chapel for the complex. Having seen Vella's previous



Five small paintings narrate stages in the life of the missionary. They include reflective elements, allowing visitors to see themselves both literally and figuratively. PHOTO: LORELLA CASTILLO

work on a chapel in Santa Lucija, Fr Agius was confident that Vella could bring this vision to life.

"When I started, I listened like an empty vessel," Vella says, emphasising the collaborative approach he took to accommodate the needs and desires of the Missio team.

This thoughtful approach resulted in a chapel that speaks to both the spiritual and human elements of a missionary's journey.

One of the most striking features is a series of five small paintings by Vella, arranged along the left wall. These artworks narrate key phases of a missionary's life, incorporating reflective surfaces so that visitors can literally see themselves within the context of the journey. This blend of storytelling and personal engagement encourages a deeper connection for all visitors.

On the opposite wall, a stained-glass window adorned with a curved mosaic symbol-

ises the protective mantle of the Virgin Mary. The curves, which form a cross, draw the visitor's eye towards the tabernacle, where the journey culminates in the presence of Christ in the tabernacle. These artistic elements are inspired by a theological reflection from Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement, who once said: "In the presence of Jesus and Mary, we are in the bosom of the Father."

A HARMONIOUS BLEND OF NATURE AND SPIRITUALITY

The chapel's design embraces natural tones and earthy elements to evoke a feeling of being at the heart of creation. The use of Ashwood benches, arranged in four concentric arcs, and a cantilevered altar shaped like an ellipse, add to the organic flow of the space.

The tabernacle, made from antique gold-painted metal,

features a circular design with triangles forming a cross, symbolising the North Star, a guiding light for missionaries.

Every detail in the chapel was carefully considered, from the lighting that filters in through strategic spaces, to the materials chosen for their connection to the earth. This fusion of nature and architecture helps to create a serene atmosphere, perfectly in tune with the spiritual purpose of the chapel.

A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

Cardinal Luis Tagle, who visited Malta in May, inaugurated the chapel and praised the central role of missionary work within the Church.

"This chapel is proof that our work as missionaries is central to the Church's essence," he said, highlighting how such spaces remind us of the Church's mission and the importance of maintaining its

zeal for life. For Vella, the chapel's creation was as much about the journey as it was about the final product.

"The entire process was built on relationships," he reflected. "Collaborating with the team and craftsmen enriched me both professionally and personally. It felt like every conversation and every design choice was a tile in a larger mosaic, reflecting both human and spiritual elements."

A TESTAMENT TO MISSION AND SPIRIT

The new Missio Malta chapel is more than just a place of worship; it is a testament to the missionary spirit. Through its thoughtful design and deep symbolism, Vella has created a space that not only serves the community but also embodies the journey of faith and service.

The chapel stands as a peaceful, sacred environment, reflecting the mission of Missio Malta and inspiring all who step inside to reflect on their own spiritual path.

With its unique blend of art, architecture and spirituality, the chapel is poised to become a central part of Missio Malta's efforts, uniting people through faith, reflection and the shared experience of a missionary journey.

For more information about the artist, visit www.anthonypatrickvella.com.