

The Papal Order of Saint Gregory the Great

The Papal Order of Saint Gregory was originally founded by Pope Gregory XVI on 1 September 1831, in four classes - Knights Grand Cross (1st class), Knights Grand Cross (2nd class), Knights Commander, and Knights. The regulations concerning the grades and uniform were then expanded in a further Bull dated 30 May 1834. As part of the reform of the Papal Orders instituted by Saint Pius X on 7 February 1905, the grades of the Order were modified by the addition of a Star for a higher category of Knights Commander and the suppression of the 2nd class of Knight Grand Cross, paralleling the grades of the Ordine Piano and the newly founded Order of Saint Sylvester. Pius X also assigned to the Papal Knights a particular place in Papal processions and in ceremonies of the Church.

Awards of the Order are usually made on the recommendation of Diocesan Bishops or Nuncios for specific services. Unlike membership of the Military Orders (Malta, the Holy Sepulcher), membership of the Order of Saint Gregory does not impose any special obligations. It is thus the preferred award to acknowledge an individual's particular meritorious service to the Church. A Bishop wishing to recommend an individual for this honour will draw up a suitable letter proposing the candidate's name, with a c.v., and forward it with his recommendation to the Apostolic Nuncio. The Nuncio may consult with the Bishop regarding the grade - if, perhaps, the grade suggested may be inappropriate - but will then usually forward the recommendation to the Secretariat of State. There the candidate's name is considered carefully and, if approved, a Diploma is drawn up in Latin (and the candidate's forenames are translated into Latin) and this receives the signature and seal of the Cardinal Secretary of State. It is then delivered to the recipient. Usually, Papal awards give rise to a nominal "tax" charge to cover the expenses concerned - this charge may be paid by the Diocese but is usually reimbursed by the recipient.

The highest rank, that of Grand Cross, is an exceptional award - and those who receive it have usually already been a member of Saint Gregory in one of the lower ranks before being promoted. Knights Grand Cross wear a more elaborate uniform with more extensive silver braid, a white plumed hat instead of the black plumes common to the lower ranks, while the badge is worn from the broad Riband of the Order on the left hip and the breast star. Knights Commander wear a less elaborate uniform, with the badge worn suspended from the ribbon of the Order around the neck, while the higher rank (Knight Commander with Star) also wears the breast star.

Since 1994 Dames have been admitted in the same grades as men. They do not wear the uniform or sword, their Grand Cross Riband is narrower and the Commander's badge is worn from a bow on the left breast.