



November 18, 2025

Guidelines for Service Uniforms: Order of Malta, Federal Association, USA

Dear Fellow Pilgrim to Lourdes:

You will notice during our week in Lourdes that all Knights and Dames of the Order of Malta, and many of their guests, wear “service uniforms.” These uniforms are important for several reasons, not the least of which is they serve as reminders that the Order is both a military order and a sovereign state.

The uniforms also serve less tangible purposes. The similarities among the uniforms show how we are all part of one order, one community, with the Lieutenant of the Grand Master as our leader and religious superior. The slight differences in appearance show the individuality of the various communities, or Associations, throughout the world.

In a very real sense, the uniforms elicit reassurance among the *Malades*, our lords the sick, whom we serve in Lourdes. Surely, the uniforms signify to the *Malades* that those who serve them are well organized and disciplined. They are in good hands. Also, the uniforms make crystal clear the sheer enormity of the prayer group behind our *Malades* during our week in Lourdes and for eternity.

Therefore, our uniforms are important and should be taken seriously. This memo is intended to help you do so, by laying out some guidelines.

These guidelines should be viewed as just that – guidelines. There are no “uniform police” secretly watching you and it is highly unlikely that you will be asked, at least overtly, to correct a *faux pas*. Ultimately the Lourdes Pilgrimage is about serving our *Malades*. Snappy uniforms are secondary at best.

But I do ask you to read this memo, take the uniforms seriously, do not improvise, and follow the lead of the team leaders and our Lourdes “veterans.”

One side benefit of taking the uniforms seriously is that you will look better for it! Who knows, the Federal Association may someday give the Italians a run for their sartorial money!

Confraternally Yours,

Derek Ritzel, KM
Chairman, Lourdes Committee

Checklist: Men's service uniform

Knights, candidates, and members of the Auxiliary are required to wear the men's work uniform. Volunteers and spouses are highly encouraged to wear it as well, and **effectively all in recent memory have done so**, but may wear their civilian clothes if they do not wish to purchase the uniform.

Purchased Online:

1. Black, military-style jacket with epaulets and Order of Malta patch on left shoulder:
 - a. The standard-issue jacket is a black ripstop BDU shirt.
2. Black trousers with no cuffs:
 - a. The standard-issue trousers also are black ripstop BDUs.
3. Black rain jacket (optional):
 - a. A black rain poncho¹ or black rainproof golf jacket¹ with no commercial logos also are acceptable. Please, **only black ponchos and jackets for the men**.
4. Necktie:
 - a. The standard issue tie is a dark gray tie with white Malta crosses.
 - b. A plain black tie is an acceptable alternative¹.
5. Belt:
 - a. Order of Malta belt worn over the black jacket. The standard issue Federal Association belt is the "British Association-style" belt. These items are custom made in advance of the pilgrimage. See order form for details.
 - b. You also may purchase a belt from the British Association in Lourdes.
 - c. The belt formerly provided by Muscatello's remains an acceptable alternative but is no longer available for purchase.
6. Black beret (optional and recommended):
 - a. The standard issue beret is a black "inspection-ready" beret that has a red Order of Malta insignia.
 - b. Please, **only military-style berets** that have a stiff front-side for mounting insignia. Do not improvise.
7. Black boonie hat (optional)
8. Black V-neck sweater (optional)

Supplied by the individual:

1. White collared shirts:
 - a. The Brooks Brothers white, all-cotton dress shirt is a good example.
 - b. Bring several shirts for the week.
2. Black socks:
 - a. Consider calf-length socks.
3. Black shoes or boots:
 - a. Comfortable shoes are important, as you will be walking and standing a lot.
 - b. Consider purchasing water-resistant or water-proof shoes, as it will rain. If your shoes are not at least water-resistant, consider bringing two pairs to allow for drying time.
 - c. **Please no sneakers, black or otherwise.**

¹ Purchased individually, not available the Federal Association.

4. **Black** umbrella (optional):
 - a. Please consider bringing an umbrella, as it will rain.
 - b. Shorter umbrellas with belt hooks are nice, as they free your hands.
5. Black gloves (optional). Sometimes helpful for pulling carts.
6. Cold-weather gear (optional):
 - a. Check www.weather.com or equivalent to determine whether it will be cold in Lourdes during our pilgrimage. If so, the following items may be useful. Only bring these items if it is predicted to be cold, as they are bulky.
 - b. Warm undershirts or long-johns.
 - c. The black rainproof golf jacket (with no commercial logos) mentioned above.
 - d. The black gloves mentioned above.
7. Knight of Malta ribbon (for Knights only) and any service ribbons.
8. Choir robe² and Malta Cross for the Pontifical Mass and Eucharistic Procession (Knights only).

Supplied by the Federal Association (to the extent not already possessed by the individual):

1. Epaulets, name tags, Lourdes service medal.
2. Please also bring the following if you already have them:
 - a. Name tag.
 - b. Lourdes service medal (silver medal hung on red ribbon).
 - c. Medical pin (if on medical team).

² Choir robes also are referred to as “church” robes. The former term is preferred and refers to the “choir” stalls in ancient churches wherein clergy or religious (e.g., monks) would sit facing one another to pray the Divine Office, etc.

Checklist: Women's service uniform

All Dames of the Order, candidates, and members of the Auxiliary are to wear the work uniform throughout the week in Lourdes. Spouses likewise are strongly encouraged to wear the uniform. Volunteers may wear this uniform if they wish, but it is not required. **Effectively all spouses and volunteers in recent memory have opted to wear the uniform.**

If you require assistance in obtaining a veil as discussed below, please email Todd Gangell, KM at uniforms.smom-fa@outlook.com to discuss the options available.

1. White cotton nurse's veil.
 - a. An acceptable alternative is the white veil offered by the Lebanese Association in Lourdes and the veils offered by the Federal Association in prior years.
 - b. The Federal Association will have pins available for these veils in Lourdes.

Supplied by the individual:

1. Cape:
 - a. Dames of Malta receive capes upon their investiture.
 - b. If not a Dame, the Federal Association has capes available for rental. **Please do not borrow a cape from a Dame**, as the rental capes conform to Rome's new guidelines for volunteer capes (the crosses are slightly smaller).
2. Nurse's uniform:
 - a. White nurse's dress or a white blouse and white knee-length skirt.
 - b. Black or beige (not white) stockings.
 - c. White nursing-style apron with bib (optional).
3. Black shoes:
 - a. Comfortable shoes are important, as you will be walking and standing a lot.
 - b. Consider purchasing water-resistant or water-proof shoes, as it will rain. If your shoes are not at least water-resistant, consider bringing two pairs to allow for drying time.
 - c. **Please no sneakers, black or otherwise.**
4. Red cardigan sweater (not orange or fuchsia).
5. Red belt (optional):
 - a. The red belt sold by the British Association in Lourdes is a nice option.
6. Rain gear (optional):
 - a. Although the cape is water-resistant, other rain gear is advised.
 - b. Red poncho.
 - c. Red or black umbrella.
7. Black gloves (optional).
8. Cold-weather gear (optional):
 - a. Check www.weather.com or equivalent to determine whether it will be cold in Lourdes during our pilgrimage. If so, the following items may be useful.
 - b. A red fleece vest or red jacket with minimal commercial logos (worn under the cape).
 - c. A red or black scarf (worn under the cape).
 - d. The black gloves mentioned above.
9. Malta Cross (Dames only) for cape during Pontifical Mass and Eucharistic Procession.
10. Service ribbon(s) (if any).

Rented from the Federal Association:

1. Rental capes:
 - a. These are for candidates, spouses, family members, volunteers, young volunteers (not pages), and auxiliary. These capes are ordered through the Federal Association.
 - b. Dames do not need to rent a cape and instead should bring the one they received upon investiture.

Available from the Federal Association (to the extent not already possessed by the individual):

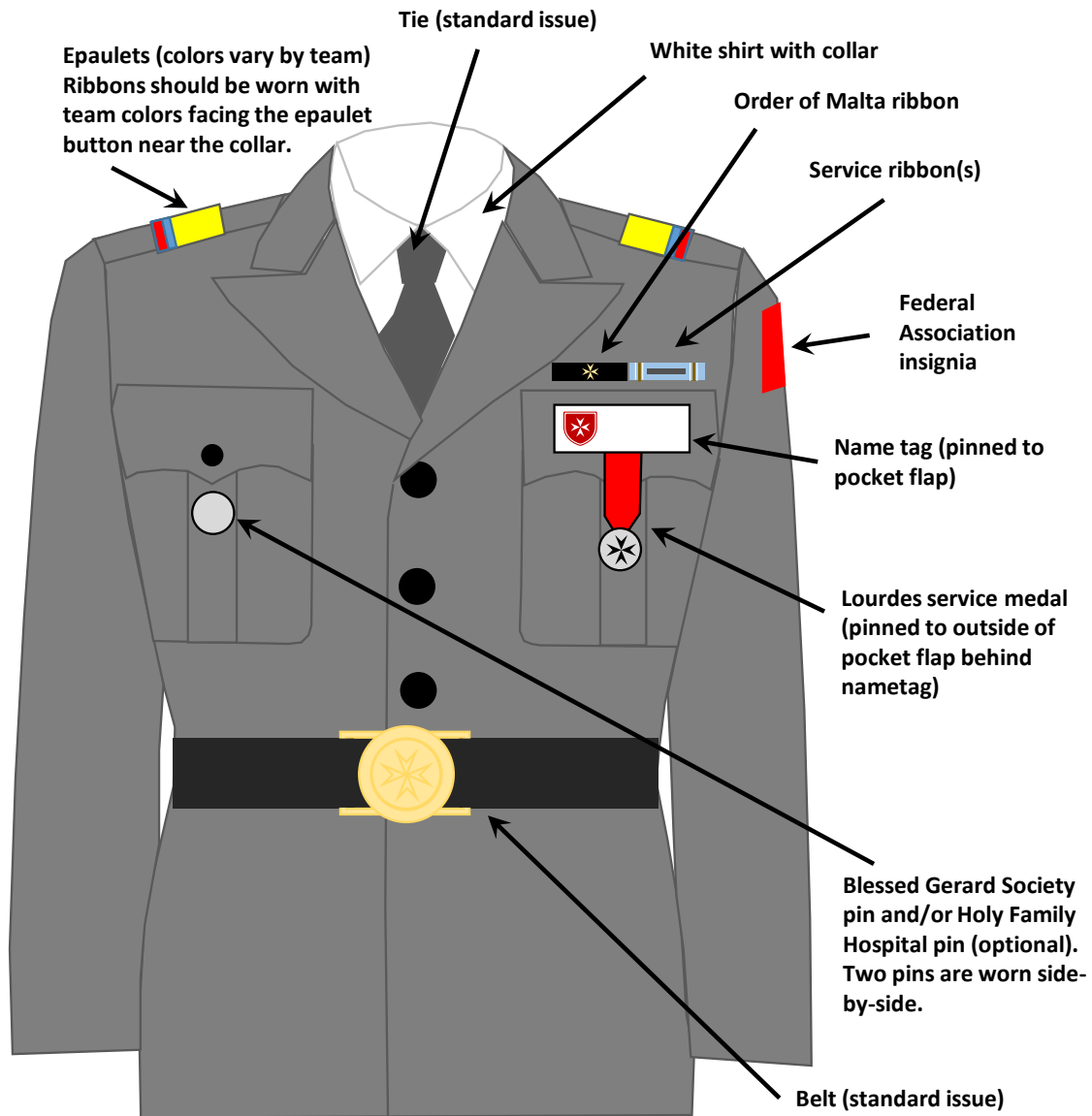
1. Team colored ribbons, name tags, Lourdes service medal.
2. US flag pin to be worn above the name tag.
3. Please also bring the following if you already have them:
 - a. Name tag.
 - b. Lourdes service medal (silver medal hung on red ribbon).
 - c. Medical pin (if on medical team).

Frequently asked questions:

1. Am I required to wear a work uniform? *The answer is “yes” for Knights, Dames, candidates, and members of the Auxiliary. Effectively all volunteers and spouses wear the uniform as well but may wear their civilian clothes if they do not wish to purchase the uniform.*
2. When must I wear the uniform? *All week, except for travel days (both Wednesdays), the countryside tour, and the farewell banquet. On these occasions, service uniforms are not worn.*
3. Are the commemorative pins for the Blessed Gerard Society and the Holy Family Hospital fundraiser allowed on the uniform? *Yes. For men, please place these pins on your right side, on the breast pocket, with the top about a half inch below the pocket flap.*
4. Are other commemorative pins allowed on the uniform? *Yes, but only if they are approximately the size of a normal lapel pin. Please be discreet and limit the number of pins. Less is more. Also, women have the option to wear the pins on their blouse, apron or sweater inside their cape and are encouraged to do so. Unfortunately, the men have no such option for downplaying the pins.*
5. Are women allowed to wear name tags, service ribbons, and Lourdes medals on their capes? *Yes. Although normally they should be worn centered at the top of the apron, they may be worn on the cape if otherwise they would not be visible. The only exception is the Pontifical Mass and Eucharistic Procession when the cape becomes the Dame's choir robe. In this case, only the Cross of the Order for Dames may be worn on the cape.*
6. When do women wear their capes? *Throughout the week whenever the work uniforms are worn. However, during the Eucharistic Procession on Saturday afternoon and the Pontifical Mass on Sunday morning, the cape with the large, embroidered Malta Cross on the left side becomes the formal choir robe and thereby protocol dictates that it should only be worn by Dames, not candidates, spouses, volunteers, or auxiliary. Note, however, that inclement weather may make it ill-advised for women who are not Dames to remove their capes during the Eucharistic Procession (the Pontifical Mass normally is indoors).*
7. I am a member of the medical profession (physician, dentist, nurse, or pharmacist). How do I get the medical pin? *The pin is provided by the International Medical Association of Lourdes. Medical professionals on their first pilgrimage should contact the pilgrimage medical director (through their team leader if they like) to obtain a medical pin upon their arrival in Lourdes.*
8. Are black baseball caps with the Order of Malta logo acceptable? *No.*
9. Is any other type of headgear for men other than the beret acceptable? *No.*
10. Is it acceptable to wear the beret during Mass? *No. This guideline includes the Grotto Mass.*
11. What should I do with my beret when I take it off? *It should be tucked under your belt in a vertical fashion and folded over the belt. Tucking it under an epaulet is discouraged.*

12. What is the difference between a medal and a ribbon? *Ribbons signify that one is a member of the Order of Malta or commemorate some service to the Order. They are rectangular and are about 1.375 inches long by about 0.375 inches wide. They are worn above the nametag. Medals are what you would normally consider a medal to be – a circular, imprinted piece of metal at the end of a one-inch-wide ribbon that is several inches long. They are worn below the nametag.*
13. What medals should be worn on the uniform? *Just the red Lourdes service medal. The blue Hospitalité Notre Dame de Lourdes medal is also acceptable (for the relatively few people who have it). No other medals are worn.*
14. What are those “stars” on the red Lourdes service medal? *Those “stars” are small Malta crosses that indicate the number of times the wearer has attended the Order of Malta’s Lourdes pilgrimage. A small silver cross represents one pilgrimage, whereas a gold cross represents five.*
15. I have more than one service ribbon. How do I place the ribbons on my uniform? *There are guidelines for ribbon placement (see following pages). Also, use a ribbon mount for more than one ribbon. These mounts are available from the Federal Association in Lourdes.*
16. What ribbons are acceptable? *Only those ribbons representing decorations legitimately issued to the wearer by the Order of Malta or any of its related entities. No ribbons issued by other persons or institutions, Catholic, military, or secular, should be worn.*
17. Is it acceptable to wear insignia or ribbons from other Catholic Orders or fraternal organizations (e.g., Holy Sepulchre, St. Gregory, Knights of Columbus)? *No.*
18. I lost the metal clasp for the back of my pin, nametag, ribbon(s), etc., how do I get a replacement? *Your team leader has replacement clasps.*
19. How do I purchase a British Association belt or a Lebanese Association veil? *Ask your team leader or assistant team leader and he/she will guide you to the stores for these Associations or will find a Lourdes veteran who will.*
20. Some of the items in the standard-issue uniform have changed over the years. Am I required to purchase the latest versions of these items? *No. The blue, striped tie and gray tie purchased from Muscatello’s both are acceptable. So is a solid black tie. The various versions of the men’s belt all are acceptable.*
21. Who qualifies as a “Page?” *Generally, boys and girls not yet in high school who are accompanying a family member on the Lourdes Pilgrimage.*
22. Will I be thrown into the Lourdes brig if I run afoul of these guidelines? *No, these are guidelines only.*
23. Is there any chance that the Federal Association will look snappier than the Italian Association this year? *Maybe, possibly. With these guidelines, surely there is no longer a need to pray to St. Jude, the patron of lost causes, to achieve this outcome! On second thought, prayers to St. Jude wouldn’t hurt...*

The Federal Association men's service uniform



Note: The men's jacket is depicted in gray for clarity. It actually is black. You will receive epaulets, a name tag (if you don't already have one), and the Lourdes service medal (if you don't already have one) from the Order during the pilgrimage. You are responsible for bringing everything else.

The placement of ribbons

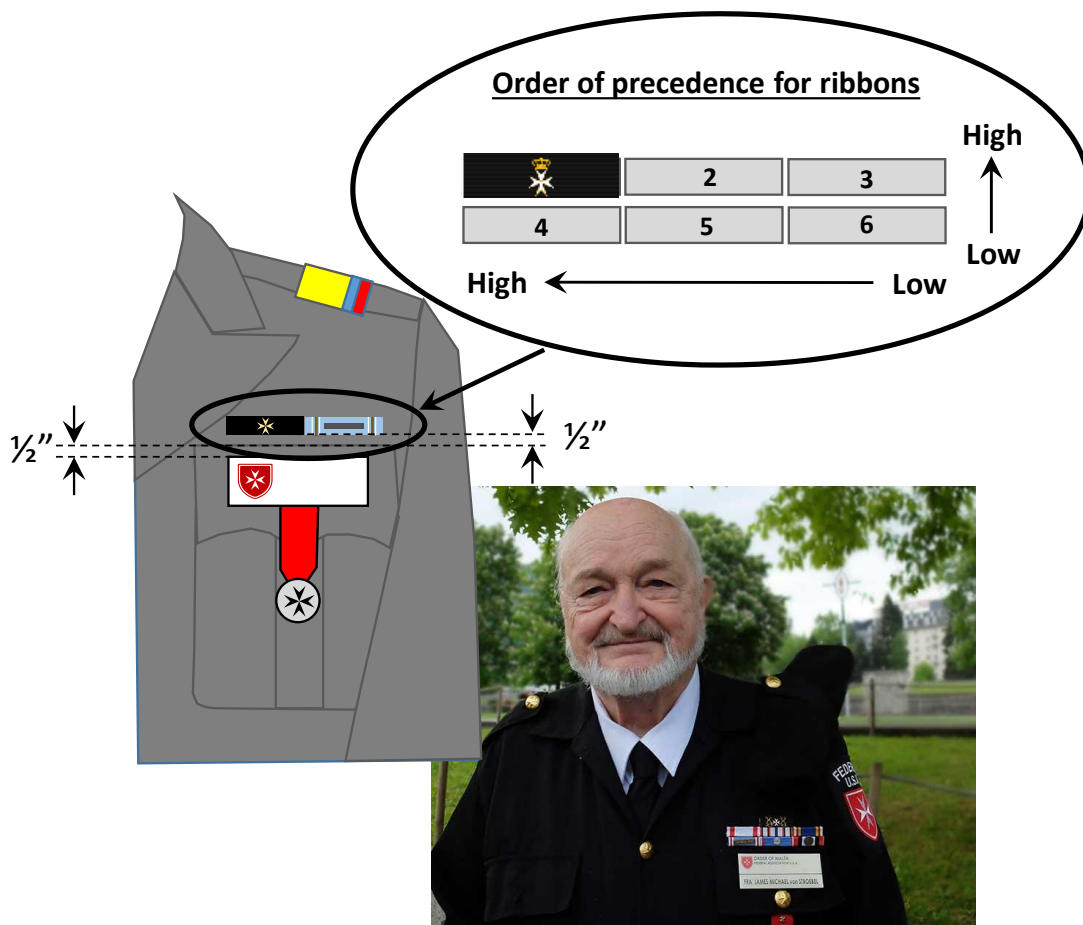
Ribbons are placed about half an inch above the left pocket on the men's work uniform. They are placed about a half an inch above the name tag on the women's cape, sweater, apron, or blouse. In both cases, the ribbons are centered above the name tag.

There is an order of precedence for the ribbons in the case where there is more than one...

Knights and Dames all have a black ribbon on account of their membership in the Order. This ribbon is always of first precedence and always appears in the upper left-hand corner of any set of ribbons.

Other service ribbons are placed in slots of lower precedence. You may notice that some Knights and Dames have a ribbon that commemorates their volunteer service for Katrina disaster relief. Another ribbon commemorates the 150th anniversary of Lourdes. Yet another commemorates the 900th anniversary of the Order itself.

If you have more than one ribbon, use a ribbon mount (available in Lourdes). These mounts keep the ribbons together and keep things looking sharp!



The placement of ribbons (continued)...

So, you might ask: "How do I determine the order of precedence for my ribbons?" Good question. The answer is:

1. The appropriate Knight/Dame ribbon,
2. The appropriate Pro Merito Melitense ribbon,
3. Malteser International Silver Medal of Merit ribbon,
4. Federal Association President's ribbon,
5. All other decorations from the Order of Malta in the order in which they were received.

Here is an actual example:



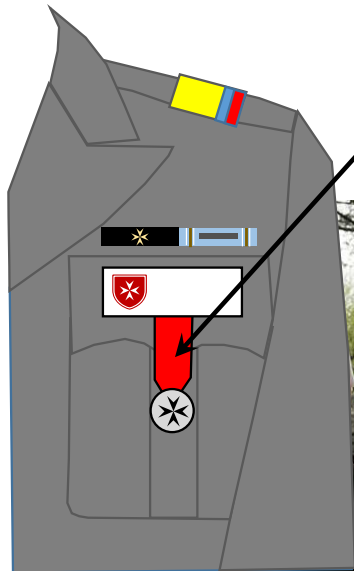
The ribbons in the photograph above are as follows (starting at the top and working downward in precedence – that is, downward and from left to right): (1) Appropriate Knight's ribbon; (2) Pro Merito Melitense ribbon (3) Federal Association President's Award ribbon; (4) 2000 Jubilee Assistance Award ribbon; (5) Malteser Disaster Relief Bronze Medal w/Disaster Bar ribbon; (6) 150th Anniversary Lourdes ribbon; (7) 900th Anniversary Rome ribbon.

The Lourdes Service Medal

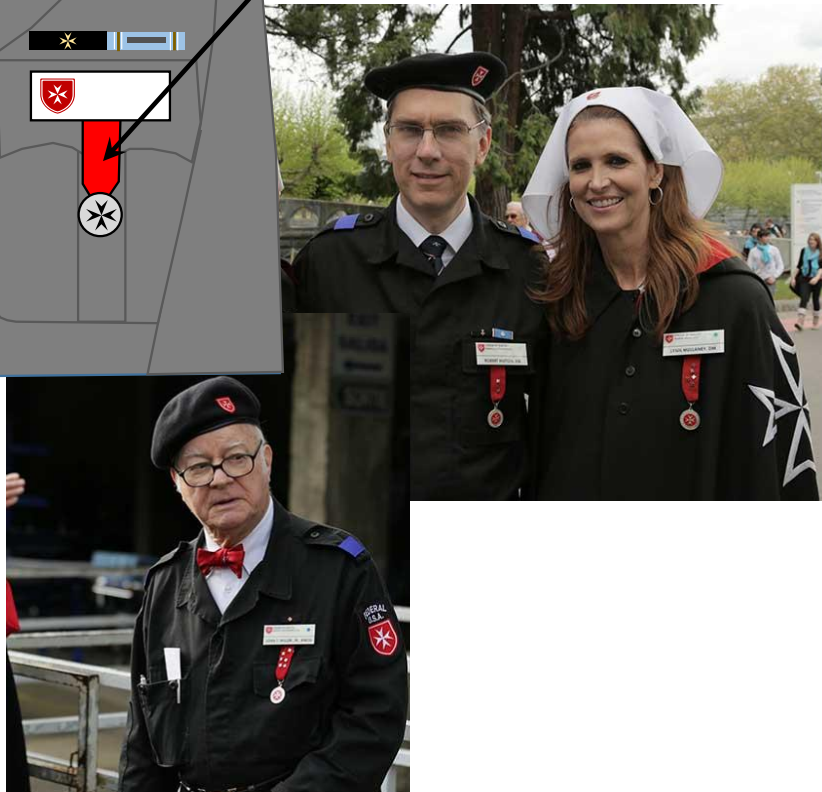
The Lourdes Service Medal is a silver and red medal emblazoned with the Malta cross hung on a red ribbon. It is worn immediately below, and centered on, the nametag.

All Knights, Dames, candidates, spouses, volunteers, members of the Auxiliary, and pages wear the Lourdes Service Medal. It is awarded to first-time pilgrims on Saturday evening, usually by a representative of the Order of Malta's Sovereign Council.

You will notice that Lourdes "veterans" have small Malta crosses affixed to the red ribbon that is part of the medal (see pictures below). These small crosses indicate the number of times the wearer has attended the Order of Malta's Lourdes pilgrimage. A small silver cross represents one pilgrimage, whereas a gold cross represents five. These crosses are distributed at the end of the pilgrimage by the Federal Association. Don't leave Lourdes without one!



Lourdes service medal. Centered on the nametag. Pinned to outside of pocket flap behind the nametag.



The Federal Association women's service uniform



The ribbons, nametags, pins, and medals appear in the same relative configuration on the women's uniforms, except that these items appear on the cape, sweater, apron, or blouse (whichever is the outermost layer; they are worn on the cape only if they would otherwise not be visible)...

In addition to a cape (required for Dames, optional for everyone else), the women wear a white blouse, a white knee-length skirt, a white veil, black or beige (not white) stockings, and black shoes (tennis shoes are not acceptable). A red cardigan sweater (not orange or fuchsia) also usually is worn, as is a red belt (see note about the British Association belt on a page that follows).



If you require assistance in obtaining a veil, please email Todd Gangell, KM at uniforms.smom-fa@outlook.com to discuss the options available. For reference, the veil on the left is the standard veil, and the veil on the right is shorter and can be purchased from the Lebanese Association in Lourdes.



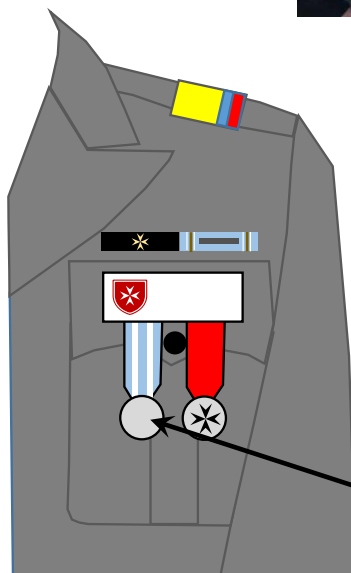
Instead of epaulets, women wear colored ribbons on their nametags to designate their team affiliation. These ribbons will be provided to you.

Variations on the theme...

You will see three principal variations on the uniform theme...

The first is a pin worn by members of the medical team. This pin is large, white and blue with a cross in the middle. The cross is red for physicians, purple for dentists, white with a red outline for nurses, and green for pharmacists. The pin is provided by the *International Medical Association of Lourdes*.

Medical professionals on their first pilgrimage should contact the pilgrimage medical director (through their team leader, if they'd like) to register with the *International Medical Association of Lourdes* upon their arrival in Lourdes.



The second variation is a blue medal with white vertical stripes that is worn alongside the red Lourdes service medal. This medal is worn by members of "Hospitalité Notre Dame de Lourdes" who have contributed at least one week of service to Lourdes per year working in the Domaine aside from our pilgrimage for at least five years and have committed to continue this service for as long as they are able. This service is not restricted to Knights and Dames of the Order.

This medal should not be confused with the Katrina Disaster relief medal, which looks similar. Katrina Disaster Relief should be commemorated with a ribbon, not a medal, on the work uniform.

Hospitalité Notre Dame de Lourdes medal

Variations on the theme (continued)...

The third variation on the work uniform is the belt.

The new Men's standard issue belt is a style commonly referred to as the British Association-style belt. First-time male pilgrims are given the opportunity to order the belt special order, and it can also be purchased from the British Association in Lourdes. The British belt is shown below (left side).

The British Association also offers a nice red belt for women (below right). It is optional and can be purchased directly from the British Association in Lourdes.



The men's belt obtained in previous years from Muscatello's has a square buckle. It is perfectly acceptable, but is not available for purchase in 2023. Three examples are shown below.



Good examples

Good examples of sharp uniforms appear below. Looking good! So much so, that traffic comes to a screeching halt!



Men's headgear

The official headgear for the Federal Association's work uniform is the standard-issue beret. The purchase and wearing of this beret is optional.

Note that any other hat, including black baseball hats with the Order of Malta logo, are not acceptable. Also, any other beret is unacceptable. Men's headgear **is not worn during Mass**. This includes outdoor Masses, **such as the Mass in the Grotto**. Similarly, headgear is not worn with the men's choir robes.

When not in use, the beret should be tucked under your belt in a vertical fashion and folded over the belt. Tucking it under an epaulet is discouraged.

During prior pilgrimages, it has been a challenge to establish some consistency in headgear. Perhaps this is because berets are difficult to wear well and are unfamiliar to men who have not served in military units where the beret is part of the uniform.

However, when worn well, berets are quite stunning in appearance.

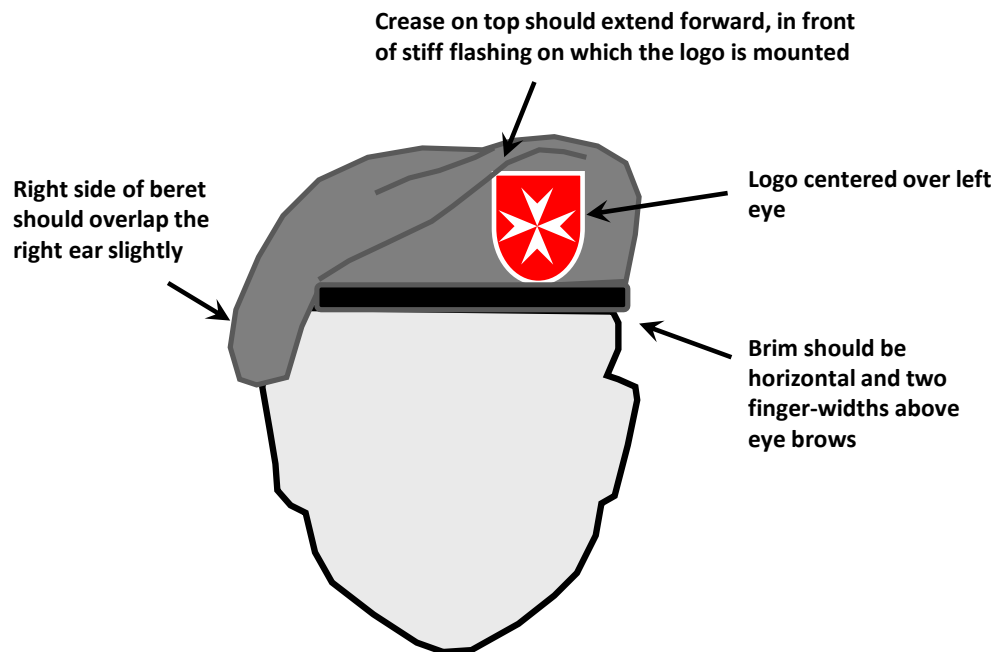
In the picture immediately below, the beret on the left is worn in the **French, non-military style**. This is perfectly acceptable and is becoming. In contrast, on the right, the beret is worn in the **military style**. This is quite becoming, and is the perfect complement to the service uniform. How does one achieve the military look? Well, it is a well-kept secret that men in the military "form" their berets into the military shape...



The military style beret

It will be no surprise to anyone that the U.S. Military has instructions on the proper wearing of berets. Boiled down, these instructions are as follows:

1. The logo on the beret should be centered over the left eye.
2. The brim of the beret should be horizontal and two finger-widths above the both eye brows.
3. The right side of the beret should overlap the right ear slightly.
4. The crease on top should extend forward, in front of the stiff flashing on which the logo is mounted.
5. The adjustment strings in back should be tied off and cut once a good fit is established.



This is fine, you might say, but why won't my beret conform to the shape shown above? For the 2019 pilgrimage, this shouldn't be a problem because the standard-issue berets are "pre-formed inspection-ready" berets. For the berets purchased prior to 2015, there is a trick that is widely used in military circles...

...dampen the beret thoroughly and place it on your head. Create the crease in front. Work the beret by running your open hand firmly from the top of the beret down to the right. After you are finished forming the beret let it dry on your head or an inverted bowl about the size of your head, otherwise it may shrink too much (remember that berets are wool). Repeat this process as necessary. To read more about this process simply Google "shape a beret" and ample how-to information and videos will be immediately forthcoming.

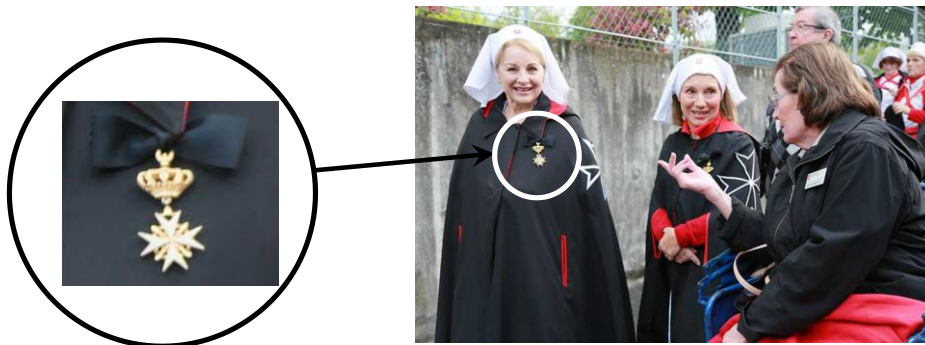
More formal occasions

There will be two occasions in Lourdes where we are more formal. The first is Eucharistic Procession on Saturday afternoon and the second is the Pontifical Mass in the underground basilica on Sunday morning.

On both of these occasions, the Knights wear their choir robes¹ (shown below). Note, however, that for the Pontifical Mass, the choir robes are **not worn until inside the basilica**. In contrast, robes are worn outside for the Eucharistic Procession. **Knights in choir robes should not pull carts during the procession**. Note that no headgear is worn when Knights are in their choir robes.



During the Pontifical Mass and Eucharistic Procession, the cape, worn as the Lourdes work uniform by women, becomes the Dames' choir robe and, accordingly, no name tags, ribbons, or medals are to be worn during these events other than the Cross of the Order for Dames (see below).



¹ Choir robes also are referred to as “church” robes. The former term is preferred and refers to the “choir” stalls in ancient churches wherein clergy or religious (e.g., monks) would sit facing one another to pray the Divine Office, etc.