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# Swiss Guard at Swiss Abroad Day



Keystone

Founded in 1506, the papal Swiss Guard continues to serve the Vatican.

"Images Suisses", the Swiss Abroad Day, will be held on 10 August 2002 at the Bienne arteplage. In addition to various artists, the papal

Swiss Guard will make one of its rare appearances in Switzerland, featuring former and active members. There will also be slide show

presentations about four representatives of the Swiss Guard. We took this opportunity to provide our readers abroad with a few details on the papal Swiss Guard.

serve as palace guards and bodyguards.

## Courage and steadfastness

The papal guard faced its first bloody test during the sack of Rome on 6 May 1527 by German and Spanish subjects of Charles V. This day went down in history as the "Sacco di Roma" and is inexorably linked with the fate of the 147 fallen Swiss guards and their commander, Kaspar Roist, who remained steadfastly at their post despite being urged by the Grand Council of Zurich to return home. Only 42 guards survived to help Pope Clement VII (1523-1547) escape over the "Passetto" to the safety of Engelsburg. To commemorate this date, new recruits are sworn in every year at a ceremony on 6 May.

Another turning point in the history of the guard was 15 September 1970, when Pope Paul VI (1963-1978) disbanded all military units in the Vatican (Noble

When the papal Swiss Guard celebrates its 500th anniversary in 2006, this corps of Swiss nationals will be proudly looking back on a long and eventful history.

The corps was founded on 22 January 1506 – the day the first 150 papal Swiss guardsmen entered Rome under the command of Captain Kaspar von Silenen. The guard had been requested by Pope Julius II della Rovere (1503-1513), an outstanding administrator who restored peace and order in the Papal State and whose abrasive character earned him the nickname of "il terribile". His positive experiences with Swiss soldiers, their courage and proverbial loyalty, prompted him to recruit a small contingent to

## Practical and theoretical training

Once in Rome, new recruits embark on three and a half weeks of training (recruit school) to prepare them for the special demands of the service.

This covers the art of self defence, handling firearms and pepper spray, correct ways of welcoming and addressing visitors, and group as well as individual exercises with the halberd.

Theoretical instruction covers geographical facts and general knowledge, the special nature of the service, obligatory Italian language instruction, and cultural tours of the new environment. Following recruit school, the new guardsmen are ready to begin their tour of duty. They benefit from the know-how of more experienced colleagues and superiors, and continually attend further training courses. In their free time they have the option of attending English courses or learning PC skills. Guardsmen who serve for a third year are given the opportunity to study for the Swiss federal diploma for security experts.



Guard, Palatine Guard and gendarmerie) except "the time-honoured Swiss Guard, which is to be granted a new mandate to perform all guard and ceremonial duties in the Vatican".

This is why, almost 500 years later, the papal Swiss Guard is still at its post, a symbol of a fortified nation abroad, executing its duties in line with its motto "brave and steadfast".

**Mission and structure**

Most visitors to Rome are familiar with the Swiss guardsmen who guard the entrance to the Vatican in their colourful renaissance uniforms. But the uniform and halberds, unchanged since the Middle Ages, belie the fact that the Swiss guard is a highly modern military corps with a modern mission, training methods and equipment. The guard has a wide remit and the tasks of the guardsmen are many and varied.

Swiss guardsmen stand sentinel at the four entrances to the Vati-

**Foundation for the Swiss Guard**

Additional funds are required to keep the Swiss Guard abreast of the times. In January 2000 a foundation for the papal Swiss Guard was set up in Switzerland. Its members include VIPs from Swiss military, business and ecclesiastical circles. The president of the Foundation for the Papal Swiss Guard (PO Box 41, CH-1707 Fribourg, Postal Account 17-249662-0) is former Federal Councilor Flavio Cotti.

can, check access authorisations and provide information. During masses and papal audiences they monitor the proceedings and usher participants. They guard the Papal Palace and are responsible for security, peace and order in the Apostolic Palace. During the pope's public appearances they are always at his side to guarantee personal protection. At official receptions they provide the ceremonial guard and represent the pope and the Vatican. As personal bodyguard to the head of the Catholic church, the guard eschews any visible carrying of firearms as inappropriate.

**Rigorous demands**

To meet the demands placed on it around the clock, the papal Swiss Guard has a nominal contingent of 110 men. Guard duty can last between eight and eleven hours a day depending on the service, and hours are often irregular. This service calls for enormous motivation as well as mental and physical endurance, because it is performed in all weathers and temperatures. No matter how hot it is, guardsmen must perform their duty, and

Rome's constant humidity entails being drenched in sweat in high summer and freezing in the winter. These drawbacks are compensated for by the opportunity to meet people from all over the world and by the camaraderie within the Guard. The chance to build a close relationship with church, Vatican and Rome is regarded as a special privilege.

A willingness to sacrifice body and soul for the security of the Pontiff and the Vatican, conscientiousness and a sense of responsibility, endurance and good service – as well as a religious frame of mind - are the principal character traits required of a guardsman.

**Qualifications**

The Swiss Guard currently comprises 103 men, of which four are Swiss Abroad. Candidates must be single, Catholic Swiss citizens of good character who have undergone Swiss recruit school and have completed a vocational apprenticeship or high school. They must be aged no more than 30 and at least 174 cm tall. A minimum service of two years is obligatory. Dual citizens can also apply, provided they have completed recruit school in Switzerland. The recruitment process is carried out in Switzerland, where the papal Swiss Guard operates a professional information and recruitment office:

Päpstliche Schweizergarde, Informations- und Rekrutierungsstelle Schweiz (IRS), Pro Pers AG, CH-8212 Neuhausen am Rheinfl, Tel: +41 (0)52 674 61 86, Fax: +41 (0)52 674 64 48, karlheinz.frueh@probers.biz. For additional information, log onto [www.schweizergarde.org](http://www.schweizergarde.org)

Patricia Messerli,  
Service for the  
Swiss Abroad EDA

Translated from the German.

**Current popular initiatives**

The following popular initiatives are still open for signature:

**"National Bank profits for the AHV"**

(until 10 October 2002)  
Committee for a secure AHV  
PO Box 105, CH-4011 Basle

**"Postal service for all"**

(until 28 February 2003)  
Gewerkschaft Kommunikation,  
Oberdorfstrasse 32,  
CH-3072 Ostermundigen

**"For fairer child allowances!"**

(until 30 April 2003)  
Christlichnationaler Gewerkschaftsbund der Schweiz (Swiss Association of Christian Trade Unions, CNG), PO Box 5775, CH-3001 Berne

**"More control over health insurance premiums"**

(until 5 August 2003)  
R.A.S.: Rassemblement des assurés et des soignants, PO Box 1280, CH-1001 Lausanne

**"For modern animal welfare (Yes to animal protection!)"**

(until 29 July 2003)  
Schweizer Tierschutz STS, PO Box, CH-4008 Basle

**"Moratorium on mobile communications antennae"**

(until 12 September 2003)  
[www.Antennenmoratorium.ch](http://www.Antennenmoratorium.ch)  
PO Box 321, CH-8029 Zurich

**"Against ritual slaughter without an anaesthetic"**

(until 26 September 2003)  
Verein gegen Tierfabriken VgT  
PO Box, CH-9501 Wil

**"For a comprehensive revision of the federal constitution by the new parliament (initiative frühling)"**

(until 2 October 2003)  
initiative frühling, PO Box  
CH-5001 Aarau

You can download the signature form for current initiatives from <http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vis10.html>



Keystone

Dignified entry of the papal Swiss Guard.