

## Answered prayers

George Cini



**Hector Bruno adding finishing touches to the church he built dedicated to St Francis.**

Few if any of those who know comedy actor Hector Bruno as the grand dame in the pantomimes at the Catholic Institute in Floriana or in one of the main roles in the TV series Sisters can picture him as a skilled carpenter.

Mr Bruno - who was Valletta mayor for two terms starting in 1993 - has for the past seven years been building a miniature church in a room forming part of the workshop where his father, Carmelo, 86 and his grandfather Giovanni used to make furniture. The workshop is in Old Theatre Street on the last flight of steps corner with St Ursula Street, Valletta.

The church model is 5.5 metres long, 3.96 metres wide and 2.13 metres high but it stands on a platform so that one is able to go inside it with ease.

One of the side chapels is dedicated to St Simon Stock receiving the scapular from Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Mr Bruno has harboured a special reverence for St Simon since the time he was being treated in England in 1980 for a condition he had developed.

One of the Sisters in the house where Mr Bruno was being accommodated at the time had told him that she had touched a relic of St Simon's with a piece of cotton with which she later touched Mr Bruno's head.

"From then on - I am not saying that this was a miracle - the treatment I was given started having a beneficial effect and I returned home cured."

The scale church model is based on the Franciscan church of St Mary of Jesus - Ta' Ġiežu in Valletta. But unlike the proper church which is dedicated to St Mary, the model is dedicated to St Anthony because of Mr Bruno's affinity with the Franciscans.

His first attempt at having a model of this sort started when he bought a collection of Good Friday statues.

"I meant to have them placed inside a miniature church but I had started on the wrong foot. It was like buying the drapes without first buying the house," Mr Bruno said. Later on he put together a display of cardboard and plywood miniatures on the life of St Paul, another saint close to Mr Bruno's heart, for the saint from Tarsus is patron of his parish.

The church involved a lot of painstaking work including the building of the windows, the choir and the pipe organ. Mr Bruno had bought several moulds from Australia and Canada, countries he had visited to give shows to Maltese communities there.

Mr Bruno intends to carry on with his bigger project of building a Little Valletta on the same lines of Little Europe in Brussels.

"This would be a walking tour of landmarks of the capital city around our neighbourhood which is popular with cruise passengers," he said.

For the past three months Mr Bruno has been doing 12-hour stretches to get the church finished by tomorrow to coincide with the feast of St Francis and as luck would have it with Notte Bianca today.

The miniature church will be open today, from 8 p.m. and tomorrow, from 10 a.m. till 1 p.m. and 6 to 9 p.m.