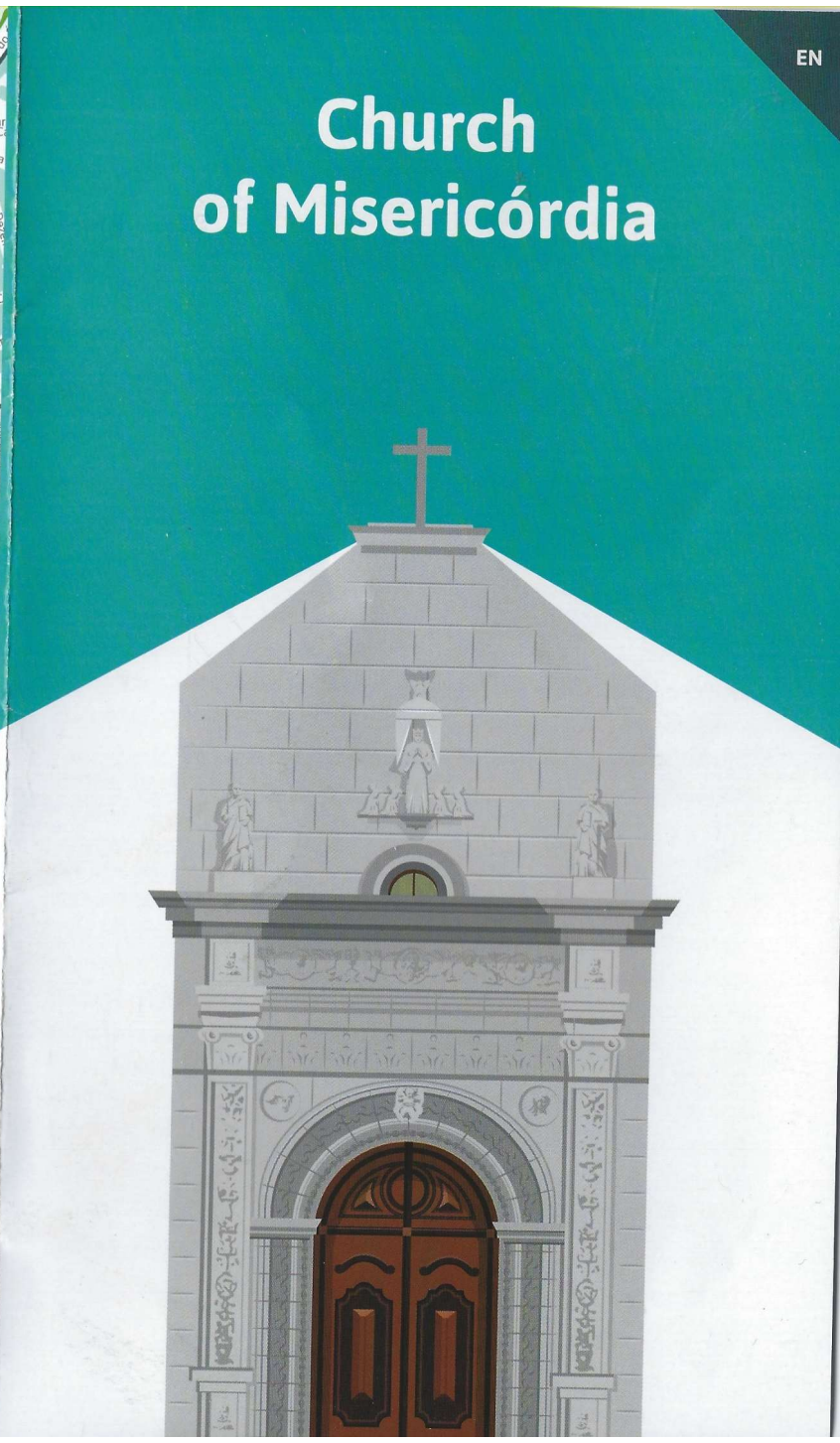


# Church of Misericórdia



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## Church of Misericórdia

**TAVIRA** | LARGO DA MISERICÓRDIA  
**COORDINATES** 37.125854, -7.650611  
**CENTURY** 16<sup>TH</sup>  
MONUMENT OF PUBLIC INTEREST

The Sisterhood of the Santa Casa da Misericórdia (Holy House of Mercy) of Tavira was founded in the late fifteenth century, initially occupying a chapel at the Convent of São Francisco and then moving to the Espírito Santo Hospital in 1505. They remained there until they received a royal order in 1536 to vacate the hospital so that more patients could be taken in.

As a result of this, the Sisterhood ordered the building of its Casa da Misericórdia (House of Mercy) from scratch, with its own temple appropriate to their financial capabilities and the high social status of its members. The chosen site was Vila-a-dentro (the old walled part of the city), next to the D. Manuel I Door. In 1541, master stonemason André Pilarte, was commissioned to take charge of building the church. This artist, who had come from the worksites of the Jerónimos Monastery in Lisbon, built a church comprising three naves with arches resting on Renaissance pillars, with the aim of creating a “hall church” in line with the modern experiences favoured by Lisbon architecture.

The Renaissance features are similarly present in the design of the main portico, in classical style, decorated with grotesque figures (motifs inspired by ancient Roman archaeological remains). They include seahorses, griffons, mermaids, twin figures, cups, swans, human figures (one with a violin), eagles, demons, vases, angels, medallions and tables bearing the inscription “MIA” (Misericórdia), among others. Under a second contract, from 1551, the sisterhood commissioned master André Pilarte to complete the façade, including a set of sculptures comprising an image of Our Lady of Mercy, bounded by the coats-of-arms of the city and the kingdom, and the figures of Saint Peter and Saint Paul.

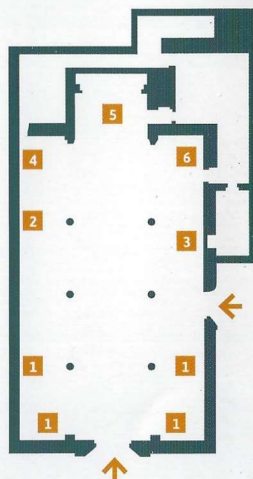
Inside, there are three magnificent eighteenth-century retables **4 5 6**; the main one **5**, crafted by master carver Manuel Abreu do Ó from Tavira in 1722, is particularly noteworthy. Here, the sculptures of the Virgin and of St. Isabel (Visitation) stand out; dating from around



the same time, they are believed to be the work of Manuel Martins, a sculptor from the Algarve.

In 1750, with the aim of letting enough light in to make the gilt-carved retables gleam, the slits in the side walls were replaced with four windows with Baroque frames, crafted by master stonemason Diogo Tavares e Ataíde.

Also from the eighteenth century and worth highlighting are the figurative blue-and-white tile panels **1**, made by a master craftsman in Lisbon in 1760. They depict the fourteen "Works of Mercy" that inspired the sisterhood's activity, and some scenes from the life of Christ, although some parts are now missing. There is a caption about each of the Works of Mercy on a cartouche on the bench, and each scene is delimited by a frame featuring graceful shell embellishments.



- 1** Tile panels depicting the *Works of Mercy and the Life of Christ*, painted and glazed ceramic, 1760
- 2** *Immaculate Conception*, Giovanni Odazzi (?), oil on canvas, c. 1730
- 3** Pipe organ, 1785 (acquired by the Misericórdia of Tavira in 1835, originally from the St. John the Baptist Retreat in Tavira)
- 4** Side retable (Gospel side), Manuel Abreu do Ó, gilded wood, 1722 (remodelled in 1818)
- 5** Main retable, Manuel Abreu do Ó, gilded wood, 1722; *Visitation (Our Lady and Saint Isabel)*, Manuel Martins (?), painted and upholstered wood, first half of the eighteenth century
- 6** Side retable (Epistle side), Manuel Abreu do Ó, gilded wood, 1722; *Immaculate Conception* (retable painting), oil on canvas, c. 1722

