

# FESTAS DO ESPÍRITO SANTO

**Irmandade de Paróquia do Santo Cristo de Fall River,**  
Massachusetts

## BROTHERHOOD

Brotherhood

Church irmandade.

Year founded

According to Padre Gastão there are no existing records indicating a founding date for the Feast. Gastão iterated however that the Feast has been around since the first stone was laid for the building of the Santo Cristo church in 1877 when the *Missão Santo António* ministered to Fall River's Azorean Catholics.

There was a pause in the Feast from the 1920s through the 1940s, with Padre Gastão indicating that the Feast did not pick up again until the 1950s.

Azorean origin of the members

The parish of Santo Cristo is composed of around 2300 families or 6500 people.

According to Padre Gastão 75% of the parishioners are Portuguese with 60% of this group coming from São Miguel. The Feast is organized and run by a group from São Miguel and others from different Azorean islands, but also includes Madeirenses and Portuguese from the continente.

Year round activities

Money arranged to put on the Feast comes from substantial donations from the church community through the activities of the Feast, which include auctions, *pensões*, and *pensões dos criadores* who donate *gado* for an *arrematação* of cattle that takes place in the church's parking lot prior to the Feast, and through the auction of super-size *pensões*. Other fundraising comes from a series of dinners held throughout the year organized by and for the Feast, and shared with the churches' other social organizations.

Tickets are sold for dinners with Portuguese soups and entrees—such as camarão and bifanas—accompanied by doces, served-up family style to around 700 people.

Some sample menus include:

The *Matança do Porco* (November dinner):

# FESTAS DO ESPÍRITO SANTO

*sopa, torresmos, galinha, doce e café*

January dinner:

*Sopa, filetes de peixe, carne assada.*

As well as the *Jantar de Mordomia*, a dinner specifically hosted by the Irmandade serving *chicharros fritos, sopa, bifanas, doce e café*.

Year in and out, the same Micaelense “chef de cozinha” leads her set kitchen crew of women, who are responsible for cooking at all of the yearly dinners. The same crew also prepares the *sopas* for the parochial Espírito Santo Feast.

Beyond the society’s charitable activities during the Feast weekend, the members of the Irmandade help fundraise for Church charities.

Members volunteer and partake in a series of dinners that are put on to benefit Santo Cristo’s church-organized social organizations, of which the Irmandade is one. Money raised goes to a common pool of resources that funds the Santo Cristo parochial committees and organizations.

Hall

This is a parish Feast.

As the Feast is held on Pentecost, which in New England often falls on a chilly late spring weekend, the *sopas* and final *Dominga* feast activities are held inside the church’s salão. The *arrematação* for *gado* is held in the church’s parking lot and meetings to plan the Feast are held at specially designated meeting rooms inside the church’s rectory apartments.

In addition to the Feast of the *paróquia*, the church is also the focal point for *Domingas* and crownings for three additional Fall River Espírito Santo Festas. This was in fact the norm for all of the churches, in the three main communities of in depth study including Saint Francis Xavier in East Providence, Nossa Senhora de Rosário in Fox Point, Providence, and Saint Anthony’s Church in East Falmouth which all were the site of multiple Feasts.

Santo Cristo hosts the crownings for the Fall River Sports Club, the Império de Beneficência, the Feast of a *Banda de Santa Cecília* (formerly the *Açoriana*, before legal and financial difficulties caused a change in name if not membership) and the *Irmandade de Espírito Santo de Cariadade de Lusitânia* (formerly

# FESTAS DO ESPÍRITO SANTO

the *Império Trindade* before a split in the association).

## THE FESTA: GENERAL INFORMATION

Date	Pentecost.
Organization of the festa	<p>The organization of the Feast is centralized within the church's hierarchy with a selection committee that reports to the Priest.</p> <p>The Feast committee is responsible for choosing the various “<i>grupo</i>” heads, who will carry out the organization, coordination and operation of the Festa's many activities.</p> <p>The groups are largely permanent, with the kitchen staff always the same and the <i>mordomos</i> often serving in their positions for several years at a time.</p> <p>The <i>mordomo</i> runs meetings with around 17-18 people, who themselves work with a much larger group of up to around 30 plus individuals. Although <i>mordomos</i> can make changes and have some control over certain aspects of the Feast—including the kind of music played—the Feasts are run year in and year out with an eye toward continuity.</p> <p>The working groups include <i>grupos de: Pensões, Compras, Tesouraria, Tickets Secretária, Banda cozinha, Chef cozinha, Mordomos, Electrician, Gado, Domingas.</i></p> <p>The group will make intensive preparations for the Feast about a week ahead of the final <i>Dominga</i>.</p>
Mordomo	<p>A principle criterion recommending the selection of a <i>Mordomo</i> at Santo Cristo is that he must be an active part of the church and the community, someone who is deeply involved in the <i>paróquia</i>.</p> <p>A selection committee responsible to the Priest picks the Mordomo and appoints the working group heads.</p>
Crowns	<p>There are 3 (three) crowns</p> <p><u>The Domingas Coroa</u></p> <p>This crown will be kept during the year by whomever draws the first <i>Dominga</i> of the following year's Feast. This crown then accompanies each <i>Dominga</i> until the final Feast Sunday.</p>

# FESTAS DO ESPÍRITO SANTO

## The Coroas of the Mordomos

This crown is the crown that accompanies the *Mordomos* during the Feast.

*Padre* Gastão said that having these two crowns—one for the *Domingas* and one for the *Mordomos*—was traditional on São Miguel.

There is one other crown however which belongs to the Santo Cristo and always remains inside the church.

The priest offered no insight into the origin of the crowns, saying no one knew where or when they were from. *Padre* Gastão was eager to caution against fetishising the crowns, saying that it was important to remember that the Espírito Santo was inside the people and not the coroas themselves. Offering that such a belief would “make us pagans”.

Despite *Padre* Gastão’s protestation however, the Espírito Santo Crown’s are considered to be powerful sacred religious objects by the members of the societies.

And his comment is interesting in light of the fact that whether it is expressed subtly or in open confrontation, there is frequently a political power play between parish priests and Holy Ghost societies linked to a particular church given that the Feasts provide the laity with an opportunity to control objects of religious veneration, objects that usually remain under the purview of the Catholic church’s official hierarchy.

The altar set up for the crowns is in the *capela* of the church.

## Queens

Whoever has the final *Dominga* has a fair amount of leeway in deciding whether there will be a child who marches and is crowned, or whether the procession will feature a queen. Given the tradition of Micaelense participation at the Feast it is usually a child who is crowned.

Crownings are not exclusive to the *mordomos* or final *Dominga*’s choice, however, and anyone who wants to be crowned will be crowned.

*Capas* are sometimes worn by those marching in the procession with crowns but this is not necessarily the rule. The *capas* used are all privately owned, none

# FESTAS DO ESPÍRITO SANTO

belong to the church.

Padre Gastão could confirm that crownings have been a part of the Feast since he arrived at the Santo Cristo in 1987.

## THE FESTA: RITUAL COMPOSITION

### Domingas

A *sorteio* is conducted to select hosts for the *Domingas*. Usually around 30 or so individuals will place their names into the *sorteio*.

The decision to have or not have a dinner is up to the respective *Dominga*, with some opting to hold their dinner at the *salão* of the *Centro Paroquial* and others inside their own homes. On some occasions a *sopas* will be served. The *Dominga* is responsible for putting on the dinner and not the kitchen crew.

All of the *Domingas* have *coroações* at the end of each respective Sunday mass.

One will either draw a Sunday or a *promessa*. The *promessas* are for specific value—\$50—and for specific items like \$50 of *chouriço*.

### Other rituals before the day of the Festa

During the week of the Feast, the priest will pray the *terço*.

### Pensões

800-850 *pensões normais*, 30 US dollars each. Additionally, the Feast organization also sells 250 special super-sized *pensões* or *pensões de criador*. There are also two kinds of *ofertas* through *pensões de criador*.

Donees can offer actual animals to be auctioned off, or can donate the money to buy an animal which will subsequently be auctioned off (a *bezerro* costs \$400 for example).

The society itself will donate *pensões* to be distributed through the Catholic charity of Saint Vincent de Paul which has outreach to indigent and at risk communities in the Fall River area.

### Composition of the *pensões*

The *pensões* include 4 pounds of high quality beef, a bottle of wine, a loaf of *massa* and a *pão-de-ló*.

The super sized *pensões* include 10 lbs of meat, larger loaves of bread, and a *garrafão* of wine.

# FESTAS DO ESPÍRITO SANTO

Distribution of the pensões	<i>Pensões</i> are delivered and are accompanied by the <i>bandeira</i> of the Espírito Santo but not the <i>coroa</i> . Some <i>pensões</i> are also taken away.
Livestock auction	The <i>arrematação</i> earns around \$77,000 and is held in the Parking lot of the church.
Musical accompaniment during the Festa	The <i>Banda Filarmónica</i> of <i>Santa Cecilia</i> marches in the Feast (which also hosts its own Feast through the church). Sometimes there is a DJ, on rarer occasions there is a band, and sometimes there is nothing, it is up to the organizer of the Final <i>Dominga</i> .
Parades and Processions	The <i>cortejo</i> starts with a <i>coroação</i> then a procession with the crown. Outside of the <i>filarmónica</i> band, there are no national flags, only the society banner at the front of the <i>cortejo</i> and the Espírito Santo flag. The <i>cortejo</i> will proceed with all of the <i>Domingas</i> walking behind the <i>Domingas Coroa</i> . This group is followed by the crown of the <i>Mordomia</i> and the <i>Mordomos</i> , then the members, many of them accompanied by their own personal crowns, large and small. No politicians march in the <i>cortejo</i> , although the priest always does.
Holy Ghost soup	The head of the kitchen is from São Miguel with other women on the staff from São Miguel, Madeira and continental Portugal. According to Santo Cristo's priest, the style is theirs.
Number of people who participate in the open distribution of sopas	700-800
Other	<i>Massa</i> is distributed at the Feast and an <i>arrematação</i> takes place after the <i>sopa</i> . They also make <i>malassadas</i> .
Number of people who attend the Festa	700-800

# FESTAS DO ESPÍRITO SANTO

Written by Miguel Moniz (CRIA - Centro em Rede de Investigação em Antropologia, ISCTE-IUL). Information collected by Miguel Moniz and Catarina Faria (CRIA - Centro em Rede de Investigação em Antropologia, Universidade Nova de Lisboa) in 2012, through observation and an interview with Father Gastão. Final edition of the text: Dulcinea Gil.