A Moving and Memorable Experience

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRIOR

Thank you, Houston what a memorable Investiture and Rededication weekend.
We welcomed 107 new Members and congratulated 89 promoted Confrères and 42 recipients of the Order Service medal. We were graced by the presence of three Great Officers of the Order: our Grand Prior His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester, our Lord Prior Professor Mark Compton and our Prelate The Right Reverend Tim Stevens.

The Houston team, co-chaired by Catherine Stevenson, The Rev’d David Goldberg and The Rev’d Dr. Russ Levenson, together with our small but mighty team from the Priory’s national office led by Michele Blair, treated us all to a weekend of great fellowship, establishing new—and strengthening existing—friendships. Russ and his team at St. Martin’s warmly welcomed us into their church and provided outstanding support.

This year’s Chivalry Luncheon focused on how we practice Chivalry here in the United States today as Members of the Order of St John. St John Eye Hospital Group management led by Sir Andrew Cash, Board Chair, Ahmad Ma’ali, CEO and David Verity, Order Hospitalier, presented their past, present and future plans as we celebrated 140 years of serving our Lords, the sick and the poor in the Holy Land. Their presentations were preceded by the presentation of St John Volunteer Corps (SJVC) certificates for those who had served and submitted records of 60 hours or more this past year. SJVC National Committee past chairs were presented with the new SJVC colors, who in turn passed them to Butler Derrick, the present SJVC chair. These colors will now be displayed at our office led by Michele Blair, treated us all to a weekend of great fellowship, establishing new—and strengthening existing—friendships. Russ and his team at St. Martin’s warmly welcomed us into their church and provided outstanding support.

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I recently received the following update from Ahmad in respect to the Gaza cataract project that I described in the previous newsletter:

Dear Prior
Thank you again for a fantastic few days in Houston.
This is to inform you that in October we have restored the vision of an additional 124 patients in Gaza, thanks to the US St John Priory’s fantastic support.

I shall keep you updated as we progress with this project.

Kind and best regards,

Ahmad Ma’ali, PhD, MPH, BSN
Chief Executive Officer

As we enter this season of Thanksgiving, let us focus on remembering and giving thanks for the lives of others and the blessings of our own.

While there is no specific Advent Appeal this year, many Confrères have asked how they might express gratitude for the sight and lives saved every day at St John Eye Hospital Group, as well as their own blessings, with a gift at the end of the year.

Ahmad reports that the surgical microscope for ophthalmic surgery is the most important tool at the disposal of the surgeons, enabling the visualization of an otherwise very small surgical field. The state-of-the-art optics and lighting of these units give a clear bright view of the eye and enables safe and accurate surgery. The second operating theatre in Gaza has had its Leica Surgical Microscope for 12 years. It has been repaired many times and is showing its age significantly. The optics are now so dilapidated it can no longer be used safely in Vitreo-Retinal surgery. It needs to be replaced as soon as possible at a total cost of $140,000.

It would be especially fitting if, in recognition of the outstanding 140 years of life-saving service by St John Eye Hospital Group, we could conclude this year by sending $140,000 for a new surgical microscope.

Please visit the Priory website or contact the Priory National Office for more information to make a special year-end gift.

I wish you a blessed Thanksgiving and a meaningful time of reflection and peace as we enter Advent, and 2022 draws to a close. Of course, the work of our Order never ends, and with that in mind I draw your attention to the article on page 8 and the link to the report of our Pro Hominum Committee regarding new prospective members. Note that the deadline for submitting applications for sponsorship is 17 February. It is through growth and the continuing diversity of our membership that we ensure ongoing development of meaningful and effective ways to fulfill our mission to serve our Lords the sick and the poor.

Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum,
Nigel G. Heath, KStJ
Prior
WELCOME RECEPTION KICKS OFF INVESTITURE WEEKEND

Every year the planning committee for the Investiture and Rededication weekend chooses a fantastic venue for the Welcome Reception to introduce Members to the host city. We are given great glimpses of culture and society in the host cities. This year, Confrères were treated to the beauty and history of the Julia Ideson Building in downtown Houston. It was opened almost one hundred years ago and served fifty years as the main building for the Houston Public Library. Named after the system’s first head librarian, its beautifully restored public spaces showcase exhibits from the Houston Metropolitan Research Center’s collection. Members took advantage of the beautiful space to reconnect with old friends, welcome newly appointed Members and share stories of the work that the Priory is doing around the country and the Order is doing around the world. Many took this opportunity to share a word with the Grand Prior, the Lord Prior and the Prelate. Others had a chance to get a personal update on the work of St. John Eye Hospital Group from the Chairman, the CEO and the Order Hospitaller. But most of all, it was a celebration of Confrères coming together to reflect on the service to our Lords the sick and the poor.
A MOVING AND MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE IN HOUSTON

The roots of the hospitaller Orders go back centuries and are based in service that brings people together toward a common goal. Our rituals and ceremonies also work best when we share them in person. As we move farther from the years of the pandemic, it was so reassuring to see the Investiture and Rededication weekend, held October 21–23 in Houston, move closer to the “normal” we have known for decades.

This year the easing of travel restrictions made it possible for three of the Order’s Great Officers to attend. The Grand Prior, HRH Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester, KG, GCVO, GCStJ, was able to attend for the first time since 2015. It is always special to have this important connection to the Royal Family, and it was especially meaningful as this was the first time he was representing HM King Charles III as Sovereign Head of the Order of St John. In addition, we were able to welcome Professor Mark Compton, AM, GCStJ, to his first American Investiture as Lord Prior. Finally, the Right Reverend Tim Stevens, CBE, GCStJ, presided over the religious ceremonial aspects of the weekend in his role as Prelate of the Order.

The service itself was a moving experience in the beautiful surroundings of St. Martin’s Episcopal Church, where the Priory’s Sub-Prelate, The Rev’d Dr. Russell Levenson, Jr., OStJ, is Rector. After an emotional choral meditation of the new work Pro Fide, which was written in memory of our late Prior Palmer Hamilton, KStJ, the second lesson of the liturgy left those present with the following passage from Luke 10:9 “Whenever you enter a town . . . cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’” As the Prelate reflected on those words in his homily, he reminded all those present of our patron saint’s message: “Prove what you stand for by the fruit that you bear.” As we watched the line of postulants processing up to be either promoted or admitted to the Order, it was touching to think of the fruit being borne by those men and women. It was even better to think of the pledge that they made to continue their service to their communities and to the sick, poor and vulnerable. The Grand Prior urged all of these postulants to do all in their power “to contribute to the dignity, prosperity, and utility of the Order” and more specifically to “the Christian care of the sick and injured . . . as true men and women of honor.”
MEMBERSHIP AND CHIVALRY ON FULL DISPLAY

One of the highlights of this year’s Investiture weekend was the Membership and Chivalry Luncheon. After the Service of Investiture and Rededication at St. Martin’s Episcopal Church, Confrères celebrated the 140th birthday of the St. John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital with an old-fashioned Texas barbecue and birthday cake served by the Hospital’s leadership.

Confrères then enjoyed a report on the Hospital’s work from the Chairman of the Board of Trustees Sir Andrew Cash, KStJ, OBE. This was followed by reports from David Verity, M.D., KStJ, who has served as the Order Hospitaller since 2018, and Ahmad Ma’ali, PhD, CStJ, the CEO of the Hospital. They expressed thanks for the continued support that the Priory in the USA gives to the sight-saving work of the Hospital Group throughout the region. Members heard about a new initiative to help provide funding for cataract surgeries to the most vulnerable in Gaza, and about the ongoing service of the Hospital’s mobile outreach in the West Bank.

Coming together to worship and celebrate the Order, our Priory and its Members with all the traditional pomp and ceremony is the focus of our Investiture weekend. It is both important and inspiring, however, to hear of the important work achieved and the lives that together we continue to change every day in the Holy Land.
AN INTERVIEW: DR. SALAM IRIQAT, OPHTHALMOLOGIST AND DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH, ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM EYE HOSPITAL

Dr. Salam Iriqat, an ophthalmologist who is both a Uveitis and Retina specialist and heads the Inflammatory Eye Disease Department at the St. John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital (SJEH) in Jerusalem, travelled far to attend the annual meeting of the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) in Chicago September 29–October 3, 2022. The AAO serves as the main forum for continuing medical education for ophthalmologists and allied ophthalmic personnel (AOP) from throughout the U.S. and around the world. Dr Iriqat’s visit to the AAO meeting was supported by the U.S. Priory. The U.S. Priory’s Hospitaller and chair of the St John Ophthalmic Association (SOA) in the U.S. David Pyott, CBE, OSJ, invited her to be the keynote speaker at the SOA breakfast symposium at the AAO.

Dr. Iriqat’s personal story as a Palestinian ophthalmologist who completed her medical school at the University of Jordan in Amman, her ophthalmology residency training at SJEH in Jerusalem, her fellowship in Uveitis at Hadassah Hebrew University in Jerusalem and a Retina/Imaging/Uveitis fellowship within the Hospital that is dedicated to research. She also aspires to submit academic courses for future AAO meetings in collaboration with other members of the SOA, and to teach and report on the unique aspects of eye diseases that are treated at the St. John Eye Hospital.

Prior to the AAO meeting, Dr. James McCulley, KStJ, facilitated a visit for Dr. Iriqat to the University of Texas Southwest (UTSW) in Dallas. Mark LaRoe, KStJ, and Drew Bradford, CSTJ, hosted Dr. Iriqat and organized a social event for Dallas Confrères to meet her and hear her insights about the work of the Hospital.

After the AAO, Dr. Iriqat flew to Washington, DC, and was hosted by Victoria Sheffield, DStJ, and her husband Howard Pyle, CSTJ. Ms. Sheffield and Dr. Iriqat visited the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, MD, where they discussed collaborative research opportunities with staff from the National Eye Institute (NEI), and Dr. Iriqat presented cases to the NEI staff on COVID-19 and uveitis.

Excellent connections were made at the AAO, in Texas and in Washington, DC, which will further the partnership with St. John Eye Hospital Group. Charles Mosteller, M.D., CSTJ, and secretary of the SOA in the U.S., said, “We hope to continue to bring one ophthalmologist from St. John Eye Hospital Group to the AAO meeting each year. The U.S. Priory’s support for these visits has a significant impact on the professional development of the ophthalmologists and nurses at St John Eye Hospital Group by exposing the staff to the significant resources available here in the U.S.”

at Tel Aviv University Medical Center is inspiring, and a testament to her enthusiasm and drive to bring compassionate, first-rate ophthalmic care to the Palestinian population.

Her passion for the SJEH is apparent the moment you meet her. As Director of Research at SJEH, Dr. Iriqat has helped coordinate the accelerated pace of research output and publications in recent years. When asked how the U.S. Priory could help her research team in Jerusalem with their goals and aspirations, she responded that she hopes to have a space
“Ecce quam bonum et quam iocundum habitare fratres in unum” (Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity). This excerpt from Psalm 133 is an eloquent way of expressing the kind of unity we are working towards with our sisters and brothers in the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta in the United States. The unity we share with the Order of Malta is both historical and a present reality. We share more than 900 years of caring for our Lords, the sick and the poor. These roots began with the establishment of a hospice dedicated to St. John the Baptist at the Abbey of St. Mary in the Muristan district of Jerusalem, run by a community of monks led by Brother Gerard. While now separate organizations, the Order of St John and the Order of Malta collaborate globally, and in the United States wherever and whenever possible to serve the sick and the poor.

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More recently, Members of the U.S. Priory joined our sisters and brothers in the Order of Malta for the second year in a row for Vespers on October 12th and 13th (the Feast of our Founder, Blessed Gerard) in Menlo Park, California; Dallas, Texas; St. Louis, Missouri; New York City; and Washington D.C. Vespers was hosted by the Order of Malta American, Federal and Western Associations, and regional leaders from the U.S. Priory coordinated these events on behalf of the Priory and invited our Members to attend. There is a growing awareness and enthusiasm for this evening of prayer and fellowship held in churches across the nation on the day of observance of our founder Blessed Gerard, and next year the Order of St John will once again host this event.

Our Priory was deeply honored by the presence of Fra’ John Timothy Dunlap, the Lieutenant of the Grand Master of the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta at our recent Investiture and Rededication weekend in Houston, Texas.

Fra’ John Dunlap was appointed by His Holiness Pope Francis to lead the worldwide Order of Malta on June 13th. Fra’ John is also a member of our Order and is no stranger to our Members in the New York Region, where he practiced law for many years. His presence in Houston was wonderful and historical, as it was observed that this is the first time in our more than nine hundred-year history that the leader of the Order of Malta and the Grand Prior of The Most Venerable Order attended the same Investiture service.

Prior Nigel Heath, KStJ, and Paul Martin, CStJ, Priory Liaison to the American, Federal and Western Associations, continued to represent the Priory at the Investitures hosted by the Federal Association and the Western Association, while Kazie Harvey, DSTJ, and The Rev’d Canon Carl Turner, MStJ, represented our Priory at the American Association Investiture in New York City. These events offer excellent opportunities to meet members and leaders of the Order of Malta from across the country and the world. New Knights and Dames seem to be especially interested in the history of the Order of St John and the life-changing work our Priory in the U.S.A. does to support St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group. Order of Malta leadership is aware of our desire to collaborate more closely with them in community service to the sick and the poor across the country, and will alert us to opportunities as they arise in our Regions. For more information, please contact our Priory Liaison, Paul Martin (menlo1987@gmail.com).
2023 NOMINATION PROCESS

The 2023 nomination process for appointment of prospective Members to, and promotion of current Members within, the Order of St John was launched earlier this month.

There are a few changes to the process that align with changes made by the Order Honours and Awards Committee (OHAC) in London, including a more standardized form, Grade standards that reflect the Order’s Values and a “Citation” section which allows a joint statement from the Sponsor and Seconder as to the qualifications of the candidate.

The nomination process is conducted entirely online, which streamlines the process and makes it easier for PHAC to receive and review the nominations. The online platform is very user-friendly and allows you to save your work and return to it later. You may access the link to the electronic form here (you must login to the Member Section of the Priory website to access the form; if you have not yet logged into the Member Section, please follow these instructions). Please note that paper nomination forms are no longer accepted.

To assist in identifying qualified prospective Members, the Pro Hominum Committee has put together a helpful guide found here.

The Priory’s Regional Chairs and their designees are taking the lead in managing the process for the nomination of prospective members for appointment in their regions. As you begin to identify prospective members, please keep the Regional Chair(s) in the region in which the prospective member resides—whether or not it is your assigned Region—apprised of your intent to nominate. A list of the Regional Chairs may be found here. Please note that all nominations for promotion will be made by the Regional Chairs.

As a reminder, only Members in good standing may participate in the nomination process. Nominators (Sponsors) must have been a Member of the Order for at least three years and have personally known the prospective member for at least three years. Seconders must have been a Member of the Order for at least one year and have known the prospective member for one year. Both Sponsors and Seconders have an obligation to help integrate the candidate into his or her region and the Order if and when the applicant becomes a Member. Additional information about the nomination process, as well as an electronic informational package for prospective members, may be found here.

In order to meet the deadline for consideration of nominations set forth by OHAC, all nominations must be submitted online to the U.S. PHAC no later than 5:00pm (EST), Friday, February 17, 2023. This deadline is firm, and exceptions cannot be accommodated.

Thank you in advance for participating in the nomination process. Should you have any questions regarding the new format, please do not hesitate to contact the Priory office at 202-510-9691 or prioryusa@saintjohn.org.
Well, here we are again. It is the season that brings with it so many things. When we think of “Advent” and “Christmas,” we think first of hope.

A few weeks ago, I happened to be in New York at the very minute—the very hour—when the city’s most well-known Christmas present was being delivered: the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree. The tradition started more than 90 years ago. In 1931, the largest private building project was John D. Rockefeller, Jr.’s 14-building complex, the start of today’s Rockefeller Center. The country was right in the middle of the Great Depression, and despite the financial challenges they were facing, the workers at the construction site pooled their money to purchase a Christmas tree, a 20-foot balsam fir that they decorated with handmade strings of cranberries and garland. The men who made it possible gathered in front of the tree to receive their paychecks. In 1933, a publicist with Rockefeller Center decided to make the tree an annual tradition—and so it is still with us.

It was quite a spectacle to see; so many stopped to watch. I saw people of every shape, size, color and age. Some were dressed in their finery, others in sweats; some clearly could shop at any store within this prestigious city block; others were hoping for a handout. I suspect that those in the crowd represented nearly every faith: Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and perhaps, some with no faith tradition at all. But as work progressed, all eyes turned to the hoisted tree. Many held phones, others held onto each other, and almost everyone was smiling, and well, hoping. Hoping for what?

A prayer this is often used at Christmas Services reads;

“O God, who makest us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of thy only Son Jesus Christ: Grant that as we joyfully receive him for our Redeemer, so we may with sure confidence behold him when he shall come to be our Judge; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.” 1

I think whether or not the hundreds in Rockefeller Center knew it, they were straining to get a glimpse of hope. Hope that the story, the old, old story, is true; is the answer to our deepest needs—a hope, which despite our circumstances, will “makest us glad....”

This “yearly remembrance” as the prayer goes, is supposed to bring us memories of the birth of Jesus, and with that comes the promise of joy—joy which comes when we hold fast with confidence that the babe born in a manger was, in fact, the Son of God, who can and will redeem all things entrusted to His care.

I do not know about you, but I know a lot of people who need this kind of redemption, this kind of hope. There was something else I noticed as I walked in and around Rockefeller Center—what I can only describe as the pervasive smell of marijuana on almost every corner. As you know, what was once taboo, is now widely accepted, and legal, in many places in our country. This is not a treatise about cannabis (I may save that for another time), but this “tree raising” was happening mid-morning. As so many turned their eyes and watched with hope, others were inhaling something into their lungs that they “hoped” might, in some way, take away their pain.

One of my most striking memories of Christmas morning comes from 1997. I was about five months into my first rectorship at the Episcopal Church of The Ascension in Lafayette, Louisiana. My wife, Laura, and I had prayed long and hard before I accepted the call to move from Birmingham, Alabama, where we had family and friends, and where the kids were deeply settled into their schools and friendships. We accepted the call (and it was very much ‘we’!) because Laura and I both felt this call—this tug to, in a very real way, rip out our well-dug-in tent stakes to follow, moving to a land that seemed at the time—far, far away. But we made the move; we did our best to settle in, to assimilate. I suspect we were all, whether we knew it or not, putting on a happy face.

So along came Christmas morning. I had worked into the early morning hours and had only a few hours of sleep when the kids came bounding into the bedroom to pull and tug on Mom and Dad to see what Santa had delivered. Mercifully, he had deposited a bevy of gifts, toys, treats and candy. We put on some Christmas music, but there was a “feeling” in the air…. I cannot explain it to you now, I just remember that there beneath the Christmas cheer was some Christmas morning sadness. This day would not end gathered with family and

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1 Book of Common Prayer, p. 160.
THE ORDER OF ST JOHN

friends we had long known. It would just be us. And “us” was certainly great, but we were missing what had been, and we were all, I think, mourning. We needed something. And we got it just at the right moment.

For no apparent reason, our family Christmas tree toppled over. It crashed down, and the very tip of the star left a small scratch on the soft cheek of our infant son, Luke. We all took a deep breath, even Luke. Then, realizing what had just happened, seeing broken and bruised Christmas ornaments all over the living room, seeing the red mark on my boy’s cheek, it was as if the dam broke. Luke began to wail and one after another, we all began to weep. Christmas tears of joy were not filling our home, but instead, the gentle rain of hearts “a hopin’” for some reminder that we were not alone in this new adventure to which we felt called.

Then came another reminder, one I will never forget. As we were all wiping away the tears and blowing noses, my eldest, my daughter Evie, came over to me with her ridiculously well-timed reminder. “Here Daddy,” she said, “Here is my gift.” I opened it and it was a tiny sculpture—a bit of pottery she had prepared in art class at her new school, the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary—the “Annunciation.” That beautiful reminder of that moment when an angel comes to Mary with these words, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you,” (Luke 1:28). We needed that word at that moment.

Do you need someone to say to you, “…the Lord is with you…?”

That, my fellow Confrères is something we all need to hear, something the throngs in Rockefeller Center needed to know “… the Lord is with you…,” and those who were nearby in a fog of a drug-induced high—needed to know “… the Lord is with you.”

Now the promise to young Mary is not the same promise made to you. God’s promise to you is “your” promise, but His promise to be “with you,” is no less intense than it was when those words were whispered to a young teen pledged to be married to a man named Joseph some 2,000 or so years ago. You are here, you are breathing, your heart is beating and you have been given this gift of life because God wanted you to be part of the party known as human history. But more than that, as the collect reads, that same God wants to “redeem us,” and the way He does that is to bring hope into whatever situation into which He is invited. What might need that kind of redemption in your own life today? An old memory? A present hurt? A broken relationship? A nagging guilt? Doubt… fear… angst? Advent and Christmas speak to all of these; this season is God’s way of saying, “the Lord is with you.”

Even if you do not know or believe it, Isaiah tells God’s children that we are “inscribed on the palm of God’s hand,” (Isaiah 49:16).

So, my friends—this is what Advent and Christmas offer us—hope.

Hope, Paul wrote, was one of the great gifts of the presence of God (I Corinthians 13:13). Here is what I would like to invite you to do as the weeks ahead unfold. Wherever you are in your life, whether this is a time of tremendous celebration, deep heartache or somewhere in between; whether the presence of God is as real to you as your next breath or feels further away than the next galaxy—open your heart, with hope to the truth that “… the Lord is with you.”

Go to Church, say your prayers, read your Bible, sit quietly, watch closely, listen intently and open all that you are to hope. It may be closer than you know. No, strike that. It is just beyond the bended knee, the uttered prayer, the hungry heart.

Back to that Christmas morning in Lafayette—that little gift of pottery from my precious gal, now 35 years of age. It now “lives” on my desk. It reminds me that all the hope we had about that move to Lafayette was realized. It became five years of joy—memories, and ministry—that we never would have imagined in the midst of that first season of mourning. But hope turned our mourning into gladness, and that is what Advent and Christmas can do, “makes us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth … of thy only Son Jesus Christ…” —a birth to tell you that YOU matter to God, YOU are known to God, YOU are loved by God…and because you are, YOU can be glad … YOU can hope!

A Prayer …

Lord Jesus, as You came to us as a little child, may we come to You;
Lord Jesus, as You love us, teach us to love You;
And Lord… dear Lord… as you were born in the darkness of the night… be born in my dark moments, that I may know Your light;
As You delivered even the Holy Mother who delivered You, Deliver me from anything that draws me away from Your love, that I might be filled with Your love and rest firmly with faith in all the promises of hope.
Amen.²

Pro Fide,
The Rev. Dr. Russell J. Levenson, Jr., OStJ
Sub-Prelate

² A Prayer for Hope, Russ Levenson, Jr., c. 2022.