Eyes on the Future

THE ORDER OF ST JOHN
PRIORY IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
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MESSAGE FROM THE PRIOR

Dear fellow Confrères,

A few weeks ago, it seemed like here in northern California we had jumped from fall to spring, with only the briefest pause for anything that one might call winter. I had planned to open this article with a spring-like message … then Texas was hit by a weather cycle resembling a return to the ice age!

The record-breaking cold caused havoc and hardship across many communities. As with any disaster, the difficulties and repercussions last long after the story has left the media headlines. So I open this message with prayers for all those who have recently had another level of chaos added to their lives by this catastrophic series of weather-related events. As with the pandemic, the prolonged cold, dangerous conditions and loss of power and water supply did not distinguish between race, class, religion or social status. We pray for all who continue to feel its effects. I remind all of us who have the means to safely offer a helping hand to those in distress to do so, and to inform others of specific opportunities to help.

Once again nature has given us all, including those of us not directly affected, the opportunity to pause and reflect on what we in the western world generally so casually take for granted – a constant supply of power and clean water. Much of the world, including the Palestinian territories where our ophthalmic teams serve, does not have such a luxury. And once again, as Confrères within the worldwide Order of St John family, we can more fully appreciate the importance and impact of the commitment we have made.

Most of the articles in this newsletter relate to the importance, one way or another, of knowledge and education; whether how to maintain eye health and seek necessary treatment, how to effectively make donations or get involved, or about our Order’s history and treasures. Education is another blessing that many of us are prone to take for granted. Every Confrère has the ability to educate his or her family and communities about the Order. During this time when our “normal” is being redefined, we can make sure that our “new normal” includes sharing the work that we do as individuals and as an organization in the world, and enabling those outside our membership to support us in our mission.

I was recently invited to attend the virtual Investiture of the Singapore Priory, during which the new Prior was installed. Due to the time zone difference, I was logging in and putting on a suit and tie when I would normally be going to bed. Naturally there is a slight hesitance to attend a meeting that starts at 11pm, knowing you have to be up and ready for another meeting at 7am. Being able to share in the appointment of a fellow Prior and the promotion and investment of a number of fellow Confrères halfway around the world, however, was well worth the loss of sleep. It reminded me of the worldwide influence of what we do, the selfless dedication of so many Order of St John volunteers to the vulnerable, and that despite a worldwide pandemic, the work and the mission of our Order continues to find ways to surmount obstacles. I was reminded of how lucky I am that I should consider the loss of a couple of hours sleep a hardship! Education, whether in the form of a reminder or a new revelation, is a blessing that we should never take for granted.

I am so proud of all the good the Order does around the world. I am excited that the rollout of the new vaccines bodes well for us to gather in September for our Investiture weekend in Boston. With optimism, I look forward to this celebration of our individual and community achievements, and commitment to our shared goals.

Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum,
Nigel G. Heath, KStJ
Prior
**MANTHOUMA’S STORY**

An increasing incidence of diabetes among Palestinians comes with an increasing incidence of vision problems. Due to poor medical services, one or both of those problems can go undiagnosed for years.

During a pre-Covid mobile outreach to Rafat, a small village near Ramallah in the Palestinian territory, the St John team met a number of patients with diabetes-related eye conditions. Manthouma was one of those patients.

She had a two-year history of type 2 diabetes, and went to the clinic that day because of blurred vision in both eyes, her sight gradually deteriorating over the course of a year. She said, “Although I receive help and support from my family, my sight affects my whole body because I feel tired all the time. I do my best, and I do as much as I can, but I need help with my eyesight.”

After a visual acuity test, Manthouma was seen at the slit lamp and diagnosed with diabetic maculopathy affecting both eyes, a type of diabetic complication causing blurring of the central vision.

She said she knew she was diabetic, but had no idea being diabetic could affect her eyes. It is something St John teams hear often. To increase awareness of the complications of diabetes and how to avoid them, outreach nurses and doctors give talks in the clinics to the patients and their families while they wait to be seen.

Outreach nurse Naser explained to Manthouma she must control her diabetes, and discussed the risks of diabetes with her and how to avoid them. She was then referred to the retinal clinic in Jerusalem for a full fundus examination, where the back of the eye is examined after dilating drops are administered.

Nurse Naser said, “Patients are poorly educated, and do not know how to control their diabetes. The first priority is always to control the diabetes. Many patients need laser or injection treatments (for their eyes), but controlling the blood sugar is the most important aspect of the treatment.”

As she left the clinic, Manthouma said, “I hope that I get better vision. I am not scared, but overjoyed to know there is a solution. Now I know what the problem is.”
2021 SERVICE OF INVESTITURE AND REDEDICATION WEEKEND
SEPTEMBER 10-12, 2021
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

After a challenging and uncertain year for everyone, the Boston Host Committee is looking forward to welcoming Confrères and their guests to the 2021 Service of Investiture and Rededication Weekend on September 10-12, 2021. As always, the highlight of the weekend will by the Investiture Service itself, which will take place at historic Trinity Church (above), located in the heart of Copley Square. The church is just across the street from the Fairmont Copley Plaza, the grande dame of Boston hotels and our “home base” for the weekend.

The Committee has planned a full schedule of events that will allow Confrères and their guests the opportunity to explore Boston and all that it has to offer. We are excited about using this wonderful occasion to renew our fellowship and rededicate ourselves to the principles upon which the Order of St John was founded almost 1,000 years ago. Please click on the schedule link to get a sense of the great events in store. We will be sending more details under separate cover, including sponsorship opportunities and additional events.

Confrères may reserve hotel accommodations at the Fairmont Copley Plaza, 138 St James Avenue, Boston Massachusetts, at the rate of $379 + tax per night. Reservations may be made by visiting the web site here, or by calling 617-267-5300, and referencing “The Order of St John Service of Investiture and Rededication Weekend.”

We look forward to seeing everyone in September!

Richard Batchelder, David Burnham, Ben Faucett, and Gary Kearney on behalf of Boston Host Committee
INSIGHTS FROM THE PRIORY TREASURER

The U.S. stock markets had a wonderful “run” in 2020, and so far in 2021 it is looking as if there is more to go.

While the S&P 500 was actually down 1% in January, it tends to perform better after the Superbowl! Another market truism or aphorism is “sell in May and go away.” Whichever of these important indicators you might believe in, the giving of appreciated stock to the Priory is a very effective way to make a donation, as it allows Confrères to avoid paying capital gains tax on any gain within the stock holding, while taking the full market value of the donation as a charitable gift.

Thank you to those Confrères who have already made stock gifts this year. I encourage others to consider this option when making your donations.

CONTRIBUTION ALLOCATION

The new year brought a flurry of activity as Confrères have demonstrated their continued support to the Order and the Priory by making contributions for past Oblations, current Oblations, the Regional Nurse Initiative, Investiture and other programs.

While the intent of these contributions is obvious to the donor, it is not always as clear to those responsible for recording them. The Priory staff works diligently to record these contributions according to the intent of the donor, as indicated on the contribution itself or in the accompanying paperwork. When there is no indication of the purpose of the contribution, the staff reaches out to the donor for clarification.

This is why it is so important for donors to be specific when documenting the intent of their contributions. For example, if a contribution is to be recorded as an Oblation for a past year, the donor should indicate the year in the memo line of the check, or instruct their financial institution to indicate the specific purpose in the documents accompanying the contribution. Designations such as “General Contribution” or “Contribution to SJEH,” while always welcome, would not indicate to the staff that the contribution should be recorded as an Oblation.

For Confrères contributing a gift of stock, please contact the Priory office in advance of the transfer so the staff knows to whom to attribute the transfer once it is received (this information is not included with the transaction).

The Priory’s Confrères are so generous with their time, talent AND treasure, and we want to ensure accurate attribution and acknowledgement of this generosity. The Priory staff is always available to assist and may be reached at PrioryUSA@saintjohn.org or 202-510-9691.
MOHAMMAD’S STORY

Mohammad Naeem is a 26-year-old, freshly minted college graduate, who lives in Northern Gaza. A few months after earning his B.A. in social work, his right eye became swollen and he began to suffer chronic infections.

As his condition worsened, he found little relief from the care provided by local doctors. That’s when he was referred to the St John clinic in Gaza. They referred him to St John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem, but he had trepidations.

Travel to Jerusalem is an arduous journey with all of the travel documents required by Israeli authorities. Worse, the process is even more difficult given strict pandemic restrictions.

Nevertheless, he was able to make the journey. The doctors at St John Eye Hospital diagnosed Mohammad with a large corneal ulcer with fungal keratitis. The treatment plan called for antifungal treatments, but the infection proved unusually resistant. After lab findings determined he had fungal Aspergillus keratitis, the doctors had to perform an emergency corneal transplant to preserve his eyesight.

It was touch and go for nearly a week. Limited to just a few antifungal treatments proven effective in treating the disease, improvement was marginal.

Ultimately, the doctors resorted to a risky yet necessary treatment of injecting Voriconazole, an antifungal agent, directly into his eye.

Within days, his condition improved and his doctors grew increasingly confident his eyesight was saved. A week later, he was discharged, with instructions to continue treatment for six months with follow ups with the doctors at the St John clinic in Gaza.

He is immensely thankful for the medical care he received. Mohammad says, “I will never forget this experience. I was on the edge of losing my eyesight and even my life. My family and I are eternally grateful.”

ENGAGING YOUNGER MEMBERS OF THE U.S. PRIORY

As the Order of St John’s dual mottos make clear, the 1,600 Members of the Priory in the United States are united in their commitment to service for the faith and in the service of humanity. To be considered for appointment to the Order, individuals in the United States are expected to be proven leaders in their communities and to show their dedication to philanthropy. Focusing on people who have shown their support for the Order’s values in these ways can sometimes make it difficult to find younger Members who have an interest in the Priory and the means to support its mission. A new working group established by the Prior hopes to keep younger Members engaged and active as they find ways to serve across the country.

This new Young Members Group (YMG) is tasked by the Prior with representing those under the age of 45. Even with this generous interpretation of the adjective “young,” that cohort only accounts for a little over 100 of the Members of the Priory. The average age of these young Members is 38 and they represent regions across the United States. Though the leaders of this new group have only met a few times, plans are already forming for gatherings that will bring this small subset of the Priory together in meaningful ways. The goal is not to separate the Priory into factions, of course, but to help these younger Members develop connections and friendships that will strengthen their networks and help them to be more effective in doing the work of the Order. Whether serving with the St John Volunteer Corps or providing donations to the St John Eye Hospital, a confraternal community like the Order of St John works best when men and women are able to pool their time, talent, and treasure with Confrères with whom they have built strong relationships.

Younger Members should already have received a message from the Priory about the group and how to get involved. If anyone has ideas or suggestions about bringing these members together in meaningful ways, they should contact Greg Goodrich, OStJ, who has been tasked by the Prior with moving the initiative forward. The leaders of the new group look forward to hearing from young Members and encouraging new avenues of meaningful engagement with the Priory and the Order.

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The Jerusalem Tavern, which of course takes its name from the Order’s foundations in the Holy Land, has had a presence at St John’s Gate in Clerkenwell, London, since the 14th century.

The building’s use and appearance were far removed from the aristocratic grandeur of St John’s Square in the 17th century. Reputedly, Charles Dickens and his illustrator frequented the tavern in the 1800s, seeking inspiration for the author’s morality tales of deprivation and the hardships of the urban poor.

When the Order of St John reclaimed St John’s Gate in 1873, the Old Jerusalem Tavern still occupied the premises, so the Order was obliged to provide the landlord with a new pub next door, before it could use the buildings for its own purposes.

While the date of 1720 is an authentic reflection of the age of the building the pub now occupies, the 1800s interiors and exteriors were constructed in the 1990s. The Jerusalem Tavern is regularly listed among London’s finest pubs.

For more information about the history of the Order, and its extensive collection of antiquities, the book *Treasures* can be purchased [here](#).
PRO FIDE

May I begin with a question? **Who will live because of you?** Think on that a moment.

On the surface, most of us who are in our beloved Order would know, generally, what we mean by the second portion of our motto, “Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum,” for the faith and in the service of humanity. While our members come from a variety of faith traditions, our birth comes directly from the commitment our forbearers had to Jesus of Nazareth and the Judeo-Christian beliefs and practices he brought to human history. When asked by a young lawyer, of all the laws to which God’s children were called, “Which is the greatest…?” (Matthew 22:34-40), Jesus cut to the chase, “Love God, love your neighbor,” (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31), which, to press the point, is another way of saying “Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum.”

There are many ways we can promote our faith, but few better ways than to love those around us, by serving them. Pastor Frederick Buechner puts it this way, “In the Christian sense, love is not primarily an emotion, but an act of the will. When Jesus tells us to love our neighbors, he is not telling us to love them in the sense of responding to them with a cozy emotional feeling. You can as well produce a cozy emotional feeling on demand as you can a yawn or a sneeze. On the contrary, he is telling us to love our neighbors in the sense of being willing to work for their well-being even if it means sacrificing our own well-being to that end…”

While many things could explain the rapid spread of Christianity in its earliest days, secular historians and religious scholars agree that one of the most effective tools behind its explosive spread was that its adherents did more than speak about their faith—they lived it—through active love, most often expressed in service, not just to their own, but to all who came their way.

Why do we love? We love, not to win God over, for we already have God’s love. Our love is a fruit of being beloved. As The Apostle John put it, “We love, because God first loved us,” (I John 4:19). This frees us from a kind of anxious action that our service is offered with the hope we will win God over, reap some reward. Our reward is the opportunity to serve the law of God by loving service.

It is said St. Francis used to suggest, “Preach the Gospel at all times, if necessary, use words.” I like the little reflection often attributed to John Wesley: “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.” In other words, without care of self; love others, by serving.

As most of us know, Louis Pasteur, the pioneer of immunology, lived at a time when thousands of people died each year of rabies, something to which we children of 2020/2021 can very much relate. Pasteur had worked for years on a vaccine. Just as he was about to begin experimenting on himself, a nine-year-old, Joseph Meister, was bitten by a rabid dog. The boy’s mother begged Pasteur to experiment on her son. When he injected Joseph for ten days, the boy lived. Decades later, of all the things Pasteur could have had etched on his gravestone, he asked for three words: Joseph Meister Lived.

So my friends, **who will live because of you?** God is counting on us—indeed. *Pro Fide! How? Pro Utilitate Hominum!*

RJL+

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