Eyes on the Future

St John Volunteer Corps in Action

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRIOR

When Christians around the world declared, “He Is Risen” this past Easter Sunday, it brought with it an understanding of, as Rev. Eleanor Lynch Ellsworth says in her article, “new and different experiences.” This was one of those years when I, and probably many of us felt tangibly more aware of the painful backstory to the joy of Easter, as well as a more profound appreciation of its blessings.

There have been too many times in the world’s history when individuals, local communities or whole nations have encountered periods of persecution. For more than 900 years the family of the Order of St John has found ways to offer relief in these circumstances. We are an organization that prides itself on an awareness of the darkness of suffering, but continually helps the vulnerable to experience the light of hope; aware of the proximity of one to the other, but refusing to let only one side of the story be told.

In this issue there is a focus on our stories and the Easter-like joys that the dedication of our Members has brought to both themselves and others through manifestations of that commitment.

As we start to feel the relief offered by vaccine accessibility, the familiarity of safety protocols and the excitement of once again gathering in person, we cannot help but be ever mindful of the very painful, personal losses of so many, in terms of life, health, livelihood or shelter. Yet as Confrères in an organization whose work has always had Christian ideals at its core, we should also be ever mindful that we are an Easter people—a community for whom what we believe, how we behave and to what we belong provides light and hope for the world. A community that treasures the stories of its past and recognizes and values their significance on who we are and who we can become.

As Members of the U.S. Priory, next month offers the opportunity to celebrate the 25th anniversary of our foundation. We can be proud to be an active part of this history—a short one in terms of the Order as a whole, though it is nonetheless very important and significant. How we each choose to celebrate this chapter in the history of our beloved Order is up to each of us. I share some ideas that come to mind that you might consider:

Time—committing to 25 hours of SJVC service

Talent—assisting 25 people in an organization or activity in which you are passionate

Treasure—donating $25, $2,500 or $25,000 to the St John Eye Hospital

The possibilities are endless. Let us use this moment not for self-congratulation, but to reach out our hands and share our particular time, talent and treasure with those we are committed to serve, whether locally, nationally or internationally.

I hope you enjoy all the stories in this newsletter, and that reading them will inspire you to find new and exciting ways to support and experience our Order.

Pro Fide,
Nigel G. Heath, KStJ
Prior

All photographs in this issue were from events that occurred prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and physical distancing requirements.
A NEW ERA FOR THE ST JOHN VOLUNTEER CORPS

Launched seven years ago, the St John Volunteer Corps (SJVC) has demonstrated very clearly that providing services to those in need is an important component of our mission. Our volunteers find it very satisfying to be involved in helping others and seeing immediate, beneficial results.

Over the past six months the SJVC National Committee expended great effort in reviewing our past successes, reassessing our structure and operations and making plans for the immediate and longer term futures.

Major activities included:

- Preparing and publishing a revised SJVC Handbook.
- Publishing a brief ‘SJVC At A Glance’ as a quick reference guide.
- Revising and producing a SJVC Strategic Plan.
- Developing a protocol for submitting, reviewing and evaluating new service proposals.
- Giving special attention to increasing the number of active Confrères in the SJVC, and especially encouraging greater participation by younger members of the Priory.

All of the revised and new documents listed above may be found here on the Priory website. An email address has also been established, SJVC@saintjohn.org, for the submission of new proposals through the Regional Chairs to the National Committee. The required forms and procedures are as “bureaucracy-free” as possible!

The protocol for new service proposals, detailed in the new SJVC Handbook, establishes a formal process with clear guidance for getting approval for activities and ensures that we do not stray from our mission and goals and avoids ethical and legal entanglements. The latter are especially relevant in relation to the global St John community.

A future plan is to introduce an easy to use electronic system for the accurate and consistent reporting of volunteer hours.

If you have comments or suggestions for the SJVC National Committee please send them to southby@gwu.edu and they will be discussed during the monthly SJVC National Committee meeting.

Please consider becoming an active participant in the St John Volunteer Corps today.

Prior Nigel Heath, KStJ, talks with a Pearl Harbor survivor at VA Community Living Center speaker event

Don Klein, OStJ, assisting a blind veteran during an outing to a San Francisco Giants ball game

Jane Heath, OStJ, leads weekly recreational therapy crafts group at SFVA Community Living Center
INVESTITURE 2022:
PLEASE SAVE THE DATE

2022 SERVICE OF INVESTITURE AND
REDEDICATION WEEKEND

OCTOBER 20–23, 2022
HOUSTON, TEXAS

Mark your calendars now!

Additional information about hotel accommodations and event schedules will be distributed early next year.

We look forward to seeing you.
SIGHT FOR GAZA

On March 6th, the Guild of St John Eye Hospital Group and the St John Ophthalmic Association (SOA) hosted an online meeting led by David Verity, M.D., entitled “Sight for Gaza and the Role of the Hospitaller.” This was the first meeting collaboration of the Guild and the SOA. The proceeds raised from the event funded support for seven theatre (operating room) nursing staff, as well as advanced fellowship training in the UK for one of the Gaza Clinic eye doctors.

Dr. Verity first gave a brief overview of the history and mission of the St John Eye Hospital which is the only charitable provider of expert eyecare in East Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza. The remainder of the meeting focused on the Gaza Hospital and its mobile outreach. The meeting was attended virtually by ophthalmologists and eyecare professionals from the SOA family in the UK, USA, Canada, Europe, South Africa, Australia, Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank, as well as international leaders of the Order of St John and distinguished guests.

Gaza is one of the most disadvantaged and densely populated regions of the world. There are over two million people there. Unemployment is over 40 percent, and 80 percent of the population is dependent on international assistance. Gaza demographics demonstrate a vast population that is young with 36% under the age of 14. The incredible story of Gaza is that it is a story of children. The entire population is under health and economic stress with a mortality rate double to triple that of the United States and the UK.

“Saving the sight of children saves their economic future,” David says. Saving sight leads to a stronger future and this is why we come together without judgment to support the sick and the poor.

David went on to give the history of the enormous difficulty of building and opening the new Gaza Hospital in June 2016. Since its opening, the hospital has seen over 150,000 patients, including 40,000 children under the age of 18. He introduced the staff of the Gaza Hospital which totals 40 people, of which 10 are doctors, 16 nurses, five auxiliary staff, six clinical staff and three support staff. He discussed training opportunities in Gaza and the limitations of postgraduate education availability to the doctors and staff of the hospital. He stressed the importance of visiting academic ophthalmologists to the Gaza Hospital for advancing the training of the physicians and staff.

David mentioned a patient’s story that touched him deeply on his last visit to Gaza just before the pandemic. The patient was a blind woman who needed an eye prosthesis, and she could not even afford the 5% of the total cost payment to have her surgery. David was able to perform the surgery while he was a visiting professor.

To close the meeting, David discussed his role as a Hospitaller of the Order of St John. In his final words, he states, “Eye disease is still with us. But there is now so much more that we can do about it.” If you would like to see and hear the entire meeting, please refer to video link above.
FAMILY THREADS IN THE AMERICAN PRIORY

As members of a confraternal order of chivalry, it is customary for those in the Order of St John to refer to each other as Confrères. Though few of us are actually brothers and sisters, it helps cement the idea that we are united in common cause just as a family would be. But there are some in the Order with deep family connections to its ongoing work around the world. One family that has supported the work of the Order for generations is that of Dorothy Porter, who traces her connection to the Order back to her grandfather, Samuel W. Meek Sr.

Born in Nashville in 1895, Samuel Meek served as a captain in the United States Marine Corps during World War I. He was awarded the Silver Star Medal, the Purple Heart and the French Croix de Guerre for his service. It was after returning from France, that Meek began the long association with the United Kingdom that would eventually lead to his membership in the Order of St John. In 1925, the president of the J. Walter Thompson advertising company asked Meek to leave a rival firm and establish a global advertising office in London. He remained in London until 1938 and would have been there for some of the Order’s great events of the interwar period—from the return of pilgrims from the Holy Land and Malta in 1926 to the large celebrations of the centenary celebrations of the Order’s English revival in 1931. He returned to Connecticut on the eve of World War II, but his service in that conflict did not stop his 39-year career with J. Walter Thompson.

Having become a supporter of the Order’s work and the St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital while living in London, Meek was able to connect with a core group of men and women with similar goals. These were the founders of what became the Priory in the USA, and their names are still remembered by many today—Grayson Kirk, Canon Edward West, Fanny Hanna Moore and Douglas Fairbanks Jr. Samuel Meek was honored to be made a Commander Brother of the Order of St John in 1965 and later was promoted to Knight. These early days of the Order in the United States hold many memories for Dorothy Porter, “Whenever I was in London with my grandmother, we always visited the office of the Order of St John at St. John’s Gate. The mission of the Order was very important to my grandparents. I remember the ceremonies when I was young and loved watching them process in their robes at St John the Divine in New York.” The family’s connection did not stop there though. His son, Samuel Meek, Jr., was also dedicated to the Order and the Eye Hospital. Having been born in

...there are some in the Order with deep family connections to its ongoing work around the world.

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Connecticut just before his parents moved the family to London, the younger Meek grew up surrounded by the pageantry and service of the Order. Like his father, he was made a Knight of the Order of St John in 1988, and his wife Marjorie was appointed a Dame in 1998. The two remained dedicated to serving the Order from Palm Beach until their deaths a few years ago.

But this is a story of generations. In the 1990s, the daughter of Samuel Meek Jr., was living and working with her husband in Jerusalem. Just minutes from the St John Eye Hospital, Dorothy and Nicholas Porter knew of the family’s long history with the Order. Dorothy remembers, “When Nicholas and I moved to Jerusalem, it was natural that he be the one in our family to follow as a Member of the Order. We have had a long, close relationship with the St John Ophthalmic Hospital and the Holy Land.” In 1995, Nicholas was made a Sub-Chaplain of the Order, eventually advancing to the Grade of Knight in 2008. Even after returning to the United States, the family remains dedicated to the Order and especially to the Eye Hospital. They regularly help to lead the Priory’s pilgrimages to Jerusalem and continue to lead a nonprofit there called Jerusalem Peacebuilders, which advocates and works toward a world where Jews, Christians, Muslims and Druze live together in equality and peace.

Through the decades, the Meek and Porter families have shown that the Order of St John can be a symbolic family, but can also help give actual relatives a focus for their commitment to service. Even as Dorothy and Nicholas continue to promote peace at the Eye Hospital and across Jerusalem, they see the seeds being planted in one of their daughters for the continuation of the mission. Dorothy notes that commitment to the work of the Order “is a passion and tradition that we hope to pass on to our children!” As she continues to live out this dedicated family’s sense of mission, it is possible we will see one of Samuel Meek Sr.’s great-granddaughters become a Member of the Order, nearly 100 years after Samuel first arrived in London.
TREASURES
MODEL OF THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

Scale models of Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre were produced as expensive souvenirs for pilgrims in the late 1600s. They were created following detailed plans and drawings made by Franciscan friar Bernardino Amica, who had carried out a painstaking survey of the structure, including measurements, elevations, and floorplans.

In 1620 Amico wrote, “I have not wanted to make any omissions in this plan of the Most Holy Sepulchre, for the benefit of simple artisans so that, if one of them wishes to build anything with the authority of one seeing it, he may be able to do so with every ease, using the scale, from which they will find every detail.”

This model is on display in the Museum of the Order of St John, in Clerkenwell, England. Only 30 examples of such Sepulchre models are now known still to exist. The Museum of the Order of St John contains three of them. The one pictured is the largest and most elaborate.

To learn more about the history of the Order, consider purchasing a copy of the book Treasures, here on the U.S. Priory’s virtual giftshop.

THE MURISTAN SOCIETY

Muristan is derived from a Persian word that means hospital. To commemorate the founding by the Knights Hospitaller of their hospital in Jerusalem over 900 years ago, a small group of Confrères of the U.S. Priory generously provided funds for a garden, sculpture and historical markers at the traditional site of that first hospital. The garden, known as the Muristan Peace Garden, opened in 2017 and is located in the Muristan quarter of the Old City near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Fittingly, the garden sits beside an outreach clinic of the St John Eye Hospital. (see photograph). The centerpiece of the garden is a sculpture by Mark Coreth of a tree in which swoop numerous migratory swifts—a symbol of return and renewal, as these birds return to Jerusalem annually to nest in the Western Wall.

Today, the Muristan Society in the United States is the planned giving and legacy program of the Priory in the USA of The Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem. The Society currently has 137 members and is growing. The Muristan Society Committee is working actively to raise awareness of the purpose and goals of the Society. The Committee is chaired by Don Munford, OStJ, with members Kay Cox, DSU, Glenn Davis, CStJ, Tom Hyers, CStJ, and John Macaskill, OStJ.

Legacy gifts may be made in the form of a bequest, cash, equities, real estate, life insurance policy or by various trusts. The Society exists solely to support the St John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem. Please join us in this endeavor. Information on joining the Society and establishing a legacy gift may be obtained from the Priory Office or here on the Priory web site.
**PRO FIDE**

**THE PASCHA IN A PANDEMIC**

We welcome the celebration of Easter this year with over a full year of pandemic woes and uncertainties under our proverbial Christian belts. We are presented with new and different experiences for that Easter welcome.

For some, physical attendance “at church” has been limited or not at all, for a very long time. Distance worship has been at an all-time high, and we are grateful for the technology and the tenacity of those making it work. Without distance worshiping opportunities of this year and the past year, communal worship and ecclesial gatherings would be but figments of our imagination. The innovations our churches have embraced continue to nurture the spiritual life of the faithful. It is likewise commendable, and a sign of hope for the Body of Christ, that brothers and sisters have found new ways to reach out pastorally to one another through new forms of communication.

Instead of coming woefully to the Feast day, bemoaning what we have not been able to do, or complaining that we are not receiving the pastoral or Eucharistic services as we have been accustomed to receiving, we have had—and still have—the opportunity to give something new of ourselves. Offering our gifts of self and service to our worshipping communities, to our clusters of the Johanniter or to the regional groups of the Venerable Order of St. John, of which I am a member, is a significant way of celebrating the Paschal experience. We bring ourselves to the Feast by offering ourselves daily to Our Lord and giving our time, our abilities and our treasure to help those in need.

An example of a unique offering occurred in my local Episcopal Church in Chestertown, Maryland. A retired military officer, a parishioner, sent word that he would register members to receive our Covid 19 vaccinations! What a welcomed offer. He took information over the phone from those of us who responded to him and literally made our appointments, navigating obstacles along the way. I think we all now know how complicated the vaccine appointment process quickly became; hence, this offer to serve became a significant service. I am spiritually buoyed by such acts of kindness and thoughtfulness.

Concern for our Lord’s sick and the poor stands at the heart of our chivalric orders, with Jesus himself being our model of compassion. It is important for us to remember that compassion takes us beyond empathy. It propels us toward helping, toward serving those who need help. Think of compassion as the spiritual gift we can share, wherever we are, no matter the external circumstances of weather conditions, political divisions, economic upheaval or any other worldly angst. Giving ourselves compassionately has no boundaries, requires no visas or passports. It can be given domestically and internationally. It can be shared at home with our families and our neighbors. Tending compassionately to others, wherever they be or are, prepares us to celebrate the Paschal Feast.

Jesus emerged from the Judean wilderness spiritually prepared to enter the holy city of Jerusalem. There he celebrated the Jewish Feast of Passover with his friends. You know the story. You know he was betrayed, beaten, and battered beyond belief. It is hard to think about, but we do focus on these hard truths during Holy Week. We travel the Via Dolorosa in our hearts through our prayer and devotion. We prepare ourselves as best we can to bear the knowledge of what Jesus suffered, physically, spiritually and psychologically. We make it to Good Friday, with the celebration of the Last Supper propelling us toward the cross. It is a difficult and exhausting journey, even for us, his followers. Good Friday gives way to Holy Saturday, bringing us to the glorious Vigil of Easter, when finally we immerse ourselves in history of the Hebrew people and re-learn how God promised salvation to the sinner and gave his Son to the world.

The glory of Easter—of the Pascha—cannot be imagined when we are lost in the wilderness or as we re-imagine the pain and suffering of Jesus during his last days. That something good could come from the suffering of Jesus stretches the imagination too far, and yet, that is exactly what the story of Holy Week teaches us. It is exactly what Holy Scripture proclaims. It forms the crux of our Christian belief. Jesus dies, and yet he lives! That is the Easter truth.

The Gospels tell about Mary Magdalene and the disciples learning about Jesus’ death not being the end of the story. These stories bring joy, wonder and awe! Something beyond our human imagination has occurred. Jesus was not dead, but resurrected. Jesus made appearances for many days until his physical form departed this world, while promising the gift of the Holy Spirit to come.

The richness of the Easter saga cannot be overstated. The savior of us all dies an ignominious death, but instead of dying brings new life not only to himself but to the world. His compassion—divine compassion—embraces the peoples of the world and calls us to himself. He promises “the peace which passeth all understanding” to those who come to him. Easter offers hope, divinely given. It is no wonder that we deeply desire the Easter experience and ache to live into its glory.

George Frederic Handel’s Messiah debut was held as an Easter offering in Dublin on April 13, 1742. This creative genius from Halle, Germany, gives us a magnificent Easter experience.

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Messiah begins with prophesy about the Christ child, follows with the sacrificial work of Christ for humankind, and concludes with the resurrection section. As the Handel conductor Laurence Cummings has been quoted, “The feelings of joy you get from the Hallelujah choruses are second to none.” “And how can anybody resist the Amen chorus at the end? It will always lift your spirits if you are feeling down.”

Handel’s gift is a spiritual one that we can incorporate into our own Easter celebration. With 50 days of Easter (The Feast of the Resurrection to Pentecost is 50 days), there is ample opportunity to listen to a recording of this work or view a streaming production by one of many orchestras.

Additionally, Gustav Mahler’s Symphony 2, known better as the Resurrection Symphony, provides a sublime musical experience to help us muse about the beauty of the afterlife and resurrection and meditate upon the mysteries of life itself. Mahler’s Resurrection Symphony is a spiritual treasure for us all.

The Pascal experience is full of joy, a gift of God, for humanity. As spring itself blossoms and hope rebounds from over a year of uncertainty with the cascading effects of the pandemic, we Christians can—once again—find a corresponding uplift of hope with the faith handed down to us from Christ and his followers. For, above all else, we joyfully follow Christ with our faith and with our service.

Christ the Compassionate, Light who gives us Life now and in the ever-after, we praise you and seek your Paschal blessing as we strive to serve you and our neighbors. Amen.

The Reverend Eleanor Lynch Ellsworth, MSTJ
Easter 2021

JERUSALEM TRAVEL OPPORTUNITY

The valiant St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital in Jerusalem, the storied ramparts and secret tunnels of Acre, the inspiring holy sites of Jerusalem—the Priory is offering a unique opportunity for Confrères and guests to experience the people, land, history and faith at the core of the Order and its mission to serve God and humanity. The group will be led by The Rev’d Canon Nicholas Porter, KStJ, an Arabist with an MA in Middle East Studies who has lived, worked and travelled extensively in the Holy Land.

The dates of the pilgrimage are April 28–May 5, 2022. The expedition will include time at the Eye Hospital and clinics in Jerusalem and the West Bank; an exploration of the foundational holy sites of Judaism, Christianity and Islam; visits to the impressive Crusader city of Acre along the Mediterranean coast and the majestic hanging monastery of St. George Cosiba, and much more. Along the way, speakers will share their knowledge of the issues forming the Holy Land of today.

Basic pricing is approximately $4,500 per person (add $1,500 for a single supplement), and exclusive of airfare. Meals and accommodations will be at the legendary American Colony Hotel in Jerusalem. For information, contact Canon Porter at: 203-572-3652 or nporter@jerusalempeacebuilders.org.
HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

The Priory in the United States of America celebrates the 25th anniversary of its foundation in May. The Order of St John has a much longer history in this country, with Members being appointed decades before the establishment of the Priory in 1996. Several of these early Members in the United States, including Episcopal Bishop of New York Horace Donegan and film star Douglas Fairbanks Jr, formed the American Society of the Order of St John in 1957. This was not an establishment of the Order, but rather a non-profit corporation in New York that helped bring together the work of the individual Members in the United States.

Nearly 40 years later the Sovereign head of the Order, HM Queen Elizabeth II, approved the promotion of the American Society to a Priory in recognition of the commitment made by its 800 Members to maintaining the ophthalmic hospital in Jerusalem. The inauguration of the Priory was affected at a service at Washington National Cathedral and was attended by several important dignitaries including Bishop of Washington Ronald H. Haines and British Ambassador John Kerr (now Baron Kerr of Kinlochard).

In addition the Order’s leadership travelled from London for the occasion, with the Grand Prior, HRH the Duke of Gloucester, officially presiding over the inauguration with Lord Prior Baron Vestey, Prelate Michael Mann, Chancellor Anthony Mellows and Bailiff Baron Remnant. Much has changed since John R. Drexel IV was made our first Prior on May 11, 1996. But the 1,600+ Members of today’s U.S. Priory remain dedicated to the St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital and the work of serving our Lords the sick and poor around the world.

Anthony Mellows, OBE, GCStJ, TD, officiating the U.S. Priory’s first Investiture, with HRH The Duke of Gloucester (seated).