



FOR THE FAITH AND  
IN THE SERVICE OF HUMANITY



**St John**

# Eyes on the Future

THE ORDER OF ST JOHN

PRIORY IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRIOR

***As Members of the Order of St John we are part of a global family that for centuries has reached out, not for our own benefit or recognition, but for those who may be otherwise ignored, forgotten, overlooked, or abandoned.***

In this Newsletter the articles are linked by the theme of how our thoughts and actions can leave a lasting, positive impact on the lives of others, whether immediately or centuries later.

As Members of the Order of St John we are part of a global family that for centuries has reached out, not for our own benefit or recognition, but for those who may be otherwise ignored, forgotten, overlooked, or abandoned. Not all our actions are counted as service hours, nor lead to promotions, nor should they, as serving *our Lords the Sick and the Poor* is what we promise to do when we are admitted. It is often the small acts of service that are most noticed by our communities and that lead to the opportunity to explain our dedication to service and promote a greater awareness of the Order.

Like Our Sub Prelate Russ Levenson, I too was recently in the UK. My purpose was to participate in the latest gathering of The Executive Council (TEC) & The Order Honors and Awards Committee (OHAC). I represent the Americas priories of Canada and the USA and welcome the discussions of global St John affairs and the opportunity to exchange views and experiences with our colleagues from around the

St John world. Little did I know that when I was a participant as a child in a St John first aid course in the small English village where I grew up, that I would one day be meeting with its international leadership representing the US Priory. As other stories in this newsletter express, one never knows where one small action might lead.

During these meetings, we welcomed and congratulated Tom Budd on his appointment as the new Chancellor and one of the Great officers of the Order. Tom was previously honorary legal counsel for the Order. Tom will be installed at a ceremony at Grand Council in New Zealand in September.

There was much discussion regarding the Order's global regionalization initiative, and I reported on the progress being made in our region, focused on our sisters and brothers in the Caribbean associations. We held our most recent Caribbean meeting at the end of June and are making progress towards a common portal to share best practices, information, and experiences with each other.

Finally, my sincere thanks and gratitude personally and on behalf of our Priory to Don Munford who is stepping down as chair our Muristan Society as he retires from professional life. And many thanks to Rev. Skip Windsor who is succeeding Don in this important role. We look forward to hearing from Skip in due course.

*Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum*

Nigel G. Heath KStJ  
Prior

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## BAHAA'S STORY

When Bahaa was playing and accidentally was stabbed in the eye with a pen, his parents feared he might lose his eye, or be permanently blind in it. It bled profusely, and they could see deep cuts on his eye.

Bahaa's mother immediately rushed him to the European Hospital in Gaza. Doctors there treated the emergency, a severe wound to his cornea, but they said a follow up at St John Eye Hospital (SJEH) in Jerusalem would be necessary to save his sight.

"My first visit to the St John Eye Hospital was in the middle of January," Bahaa said. "I love to visit Jerusalem, but I wish my parents could join me." Bahaa's grandmother stayed with him for his week-long stay at SJEH. He underwent a

vitrectomy and multiple other surgeries which successfully saved his sight.

While Bahaa was unlucky enough to have a bad accident, his grandmother says the whole family, and especially Bahaa, feels very fortunate that it wasn't worse. "He's such an optimistic boy," she said. "I believe that is part of what helped him push through this ordeal—his positive attitude."

Bahaa is back in his hometown, Khan Younis, playing again with his cousins. He promised his caregivers at SJEH he will pay close attention when he's playing. "I will protect my eyes. I want to always be able to see the sea. It is my favorite place, and it will be my home when I become the best fisherman in Gaza." 🌟

## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2023 ORDER SERVICE MEDAL RECIPIENTS. THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!

Hon. Earnest Wayne Bachus, Esq, CStJ, 11 years qualifying service, 2012-23

Glenn Miller Davis, MD, CStJ, 12 years qualifying service, 2011-23

John Peters Irelan, KStJ, 10 years qualifying service, 1995-23

Ellen Metzger LeCompte, CStJ, 10 years qualifying service, 2013-23

Charles Stebner Mosteller, MD, CStJ, 10 years qualifying service, 2013-23

LTC (Ret) Jeffrey Andrew Ritsick, CStJ, 10 years qualifying service, 2013-23

COL (Ret) Frederick Stuart Rutledge, CStJ,\*12 years qualifying service, 2009-22

Victoria Mary Sheffield, DStJ, 12 years qualifying service, 2009-21

David Morris Yudain, CStJ, 10 years qualifying service, 2013-23

\*Awarded posthumously





## CHALLENGE COINS

If you have attended many Investiture Weekends, you no doubt have accumulated a collection of commemorative coins. Officially, these mementos are known as challenge coins, and their origin is as ancient as the Order of St John itself.

Soldiers of the Roman Empire would receive extra wages if they excelled in battle, and these bonus coins were sometimes specially minted. It is believed some soldiers kept the coins to commemorate the battle, instead of spending them. Later during the Renaissance, "portrait medals" were used to commemorate specific events involving the nobility. They would be presented as gifts or awards, and were exchanged between friends and associates.

The first known instance of such coins being used as a response to a challenge is during the 17th century religious wars in France. To avoid persecution, many Protestants fled France after King Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes. Among those who stayed were the Huguenots, who were forced to conduct religious services in private. They began using tokens known as *méreau* (whose original purpose entitled the bearer to receive Holy Communion) to distinguish worshipers from spies and thus gain entry to the church.

Fast forward a few hundred years and we find stories of challenge coins being used by soldiers in the 20th century. According to one popular account, in World War I a wealthy lieutenant had medallions struck and presented to his unit, to be carried at all times. One soldier, after escaping capture with no other form of identification, used the coin to identify himself to French authorities who were prepared to execute him as a saboteur. Instead of shooting him, they gave him a bottle of wine.

***In the case of the Order of St John, the coins harken back to their origins in antiquity, and serve to both signify membership in the Order and commemorate the significance of the Service of Investiture.***

Back at the squadron, a tradition emerged to ensure the soldiers carried their coins at all times. A challenger would ask to see the medallion. If the challenged soldier could not produce the coin, he had to buy a drink for the challenger.

In addition to the military, challenge coins are now exchanged by sports teams, first responders and fraternal organizations. In the case of the Order of St John, the coins harken back to their origins in antiquity, and serve to both signify membership in the Order and commemorate the significance of the Service of Investiture. According to Steve Leland, who serves on the Los Angeles Investiture Planning Committee, this year's coin will feature the emblem of the Order on one side, and a likeness of All Saints Church Beverly Hills on the other. We may no longer challenge each other to produce a coin in order to get a free drink or gain entry into a secret gathering, but the concept of artifacts that build lasting connections among those who possess them is as meaningful today as it was a millennium ago. ✨

*The Priory's challenge coins over the years"*





# VISUAL IDENTITY AND SYMBOLS OF SERVICE

## A NEW ARMORIAL OF THE PRIORY IN THE USA

It has been 1,000 years since a group of traders from the Italian Amalfi coast took charge of a hospice in Jerusalem. The Venerable Order of St John comes from the same heritage of service established by these traders in the Middle Ages. Many of the traditions we take part in also recall medieval ceremonies and conventions. One area where we can see that living connection between the modern and the medieval is heraldry. Many people's only experience with coats of arms is kiosks in malls purporting to sell "family crests" to trusting consumers. But heraldry is a vibrant mixture of artistic achievement, genealogical research and the principles of design. To highlight that mixture, the Priory's Heraldry Committee is publishing an Armorial, or book containing the coats of arms, of Priory members. When completed, it will be a beautiful work of art, but also an important record for those researching heraldry, genealogy and history.

The Armorial began as a personal project of Edward Ploysongsang, OSTJ. Inspired by some online armorials and rolls of arms, he began gathering some of his favorite St John coats of arms as a hobby. When he was first appointed to the Order of St John in 2010, he shifted his focus to collecting the arms of just American Confrères. "After meeting virtually with Priory Genealogist John Shannon and others like Vic Brandt and Brian Ragen, I decided to give my efforts over to the Priory so others might enjoy it." The original idea was to create a list with the verbal descriptions and graphic depictions of all the Members' coats of arms, at least all those that could be found online or through word of mouth. But Edward had bigger ambitions for the project. "I had always hoped that the Armorial would evolve from an internal document into a published book, but I didn't push the idea too hard figuring that when the time was right it would happen naturally." The move to an official Priory publication began in earnest with the acceptance of the project by the late Prior Palmer Hamilton, KStJ, right

before his term ended. The appointment of Jim Terzian, CSTJ, as Priory Genealogist was instrumental in pushing toward publication of the book and laying the groundwork for it to happen.

"I think the project provides a tangible link between chivalry as practiced in the Order with the trappings of the Knights of St John of old," Edward continued. "In short, modern heraldry serves as an outward reminder of that historical connection and reminds us in a very graphic and appealing way that chivalry is still alive and well today."

The Heraldry Committee has been meeting regularly for months to track down which Members can bear arms, manage the artistic emblazonments being produced, and

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*Edward Ploysongsang's letters patent from the College of Arms*

**Dennis Abel RAGEN, Esq, CSJ**  
(Admitted 2005, Promoted to Current Grade 2022)

**Arms:** Argent a Chevron engrailed Gules between three maunches sable on a Chief Vert three balances the central beam fesswise the dexter beam bendwise sinister and the sinister beam bendwise Or

**Crest:** With a Wreath Argent and Vert A natural Sea-lion couchant Sable in front of a Lighthouse Argent the lantern room and gallery Sable glazed Argent

**Motto:** INCENDO FLORESCO (Latin for "I Burn, I Flower", which refers to the badge)

**Badge:** Issuant from a burnt Branch Sable on a branch of Coast Live Oak slipped leaved and flowered Proper all environed by two Sprigs of Seaweed (*Rhodophyta*) the stems crossed in saltire in base Or

**Source of Arms:** Earl Marshal's warrant dated 5 May 2019. Honorary Arms, Crest and Badge granted by Garter, Clarenceux and Norroy and Ulster Kings of Arms on 8 May 2019.

**Notes:** The Confrere is the older brother of Professor Brian Abel Ragen, KSJ, and is the eldest son of an eldest son. These arms will be inherited by his son and the descendants of his paternal grandfather (his male cousins). The Confrere is a Deputy Attorney General, State of California. The illustration shows his decoration as an Officer of the Order. He has been an active member of the San Diego region and he and his wife, Christine Hickman, have hosted several memorable gatherings of the Order at his ancestral home. He now serves as the region's co-chair.



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*A mockup of the armorial's pages on Dennis Ragen's coat of arms*

coordinate the historical bookends of the volume—giving readers a bit about where heraldry comes from and where it's going. Members are also planning an exhibition to be presented at the Investiture Weekend in Los Angeles later this year. This will be a chance for Confrères to learn a little more about heraldry and its uses over the last 800 years. It will include letters patent produced by the College of Arms and Court of the Lord Lyon, along with modern applications of heraldry, from banners to seals to paintings.

Finally, Edward stressed the importance of Confrères getting involved to make this project a success. "Please

participate if you have arms, and get others that have arms to participate," he said. "Listing in the Armorial is free to all Confrères of the Priory since the project has already been privately underwritten by several generous sponsors. The more entries we have, the stronger the foundation will be for future heraldic projects both in our Priory and across the Order."

For more information, or to submit your arms, email Edward at [eploy2004@yahoo.com](mailto:eploy2004@yahoo.com). ✉



# EMBRACING DIGNITY

## REFLECTING ON A CHICAGO BURIAL SERVICE FOR THE INDIGENT

In our society, there are individuals who face the harsh reality of poverty, enduring its burdens until their final breath. When these individuals pass away without the means to afford a proper burial, it is essential that we recognize the significance of providing them with a dignified farewell. Such acts of compassion exemplify the essence of our mission to *serve our Lords, the sick and poor*, embodying the values of empathy, respect, and solidarity.

Recently, Members of the Priory in the USA joined Chicago Members of the Order of Malta at a burial service for indigent residents of Cook County. This annual service of mercy led by the Archdiocese of Chicago saw 369 people's earthly remains buried at Mount Olivet Cemetery on the city's South Side. As Ed Rutledge, MStJ, said, "Nobody deserves to be thrown away, so it was an emotional and beautiful part of our work to ensure that these souls were not simply discarded but laid to rest with the dignity we all deserve." These people represented the poor and sick of Cook County, the homeless and those whose bodies were unclaimed along with stillborn and miscarried babies. The service was led by Fr. Larry Sullivan, who oversees Catholic Cemeteries for the Archdiocese. He noted, "We do the full rite of Christian burial. Everyone has the right to be mourned and prayed for."



*Ed Rutledge, MStJ (center) helps to prepare one of the coffins for burial*

Many present were especially touched by the story of an unidentified newborn baby whose body was left outside a firehouse in January 2022. Those who prepared the baby's body for burial gave him a name, Joseph Evangelos. He was the first interment of the afternoon and the Members of the Order of St John and Order of Malta stayed until all had been given a proper burial. They offered up silent prayers at these gravesides in a partnership that goes back to 2012.

Every person, regardless of their socioeconomic status, deserves to be treated with dignity and honor, even in



*Father Larry Sullivan prays for these lost members of the Chicago community*

death. A burial service for the indigent acknowledges the intrinsic worth of the departed soul. "*Our Lords, the sick and the poor* may or may not have died alone, but they certainly were not buried alone," said Ed Rutledge. "I am so glad to have been a part of this important work of mercy, and would encourage Members to attend ceremonies like this. I can promise that the experience will stay with you long after the service has ended."✱



*Suzanne Nelson, DM, and Ted Makarewicz, KMOB, assist Fr Larry Sullivan in preparing a coffin for burial*



*Our friend Ted Makarewicz, KMOB, helps provide dignity to these lives lost by making a personal connection*



## PRO FIDE

***"...whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me."***

***Matthew 25:40***

***As Members of our Order, we know we are called—as are all of God's children—to care for the Lord's poor and suffering.***

I suspect most of you reading know the above quote from a parabolic teaching of our Lord about sheep and goats—those who do, and those who do not respond to the needs of others. I have probably used it before in my Sub-Prelate column. But I have been pondering a bit on the first three words of this verse... "whatever you did..." and the last four, "... you did for me..."

As Members of our Order, we know we are called—as are all of God's children—to care for the Lord's poor and suffering. Sometimes that is done in big and noticeable ways, but I would wager a guess that a lot of what we do for this cause is not widely recognized—and truth be known, the lasting and enduring impact of those with a heart set on service.



*Russ Levenson and a care staff member visiting with Flip at the Order of St John Convalescent Home in Stow on Wold*



My home Church generously spared me some sabbatical time this past summer. As we sometimes do, my wife and I stayed in the Cotswolds. Over the years, we have been blessed to accumulate some friendships in that region of the UK, among them, an elderly woman by the name of "Florence," ("Flip" for short!). We first met her back in 2018, but on the trip this summer, when we sought to pay a visit—we learned that she was recovering from

a recent downturn in her health. A mutual friend told us where to find her—in a local Order of St John Convalescent Home, in Stow on the Wold. I confess, I had no idea of our Order's connection to the care center, so during the sabbatical, I made it a point to visit not only this convalescent home, but another in Bourton on the Water. My wife and I met with staff and

administrators at both centers and, as with all things connected to our Order's mission, found those serving these remarkable places to offer care of the highest caliber.

While our Order or Priory no longer have a direct connection to these homes, the vision for their work is the direct fruit of their early sponsorship by the Sovereign and Hospitaller Order of Malta and The Venerable Order of St John of Jerusalem, under the banner of the Order of St. John Charitable Trust, which was established in 1991. A year later, the Trust took over running 16 such homes, and at present they oversee the operations of nearly 60 such homes providing reputable trusted care, support and housing to people across Gloucestershire, Lincolnshire, Oxfordshire, Suffolk, West Sussex and Wiltshire. The Trust is a 100% not-for-profit outfit.

The homes specifically offer services to the elderly which range from specialized dementia care to intermediate, respite, day care and expert nursing. The Trust now employs approximately 4,800 staff and assists more than 3,500 residents. In short, it is a massive operation.

What strikes me about all of this is that while the OSJCT (Order of St. John Charitable Trust) is not a beneficiary of the direct oversight of our Order, or even our annual Oblations—its work is—nonetheless, yet another expression of the values we hold dear and seek to promote.

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***I like what the young adult author Judy Blume once penned, “Our fingerprints don’t fade from the lives we touch.”***

And my hunch is, when the Order of Malta began its work in the Holy Land in 1099 and when Queen Victoria granted our Priory its Royal Charter in 1888, there was no strategic plan to put into place these convalescent homes. And yet, someone, somewhere at some time along the way—inspired by the values we cherish birthed this remarkable arm of care and outreach. Whomever that person was, it may—at the time, might have seemed like a little thing, but it has become quite a big thing. As John Chrysostom once wrote, “Faithfulness in little things—is a big thing!” Indeed.

When I connect these dots I am putting before you, I cannot help but think that what is going on here is exactly what our Lord was pointing to in the parable of the sheep and goats when He said, *“whatever you do... you did for me...”*

This is in some ways, just another set of fingerprints left by our work. Fingerprints are interesting things—they are often

invisible to the naked eye, but they leave their mark behind. I like what the young adult author Judy Blume once penned, “Our fingerprints don’t fade from the lives we touch.”

I wonder—I really do—what small thing our Lord may be calling on you to do today to touch the life of another? It does not have to be a big thing at all—a smile to a passerby, a phone call to a lonely friend, a visit to an ailing neighbor, an hour or so spent at the Food Bank shelving donations or the Clothes Closet, sorting clothes. It may be a vision the Lord has put into your mind to prompt your worshipping community, your local school or city council to tackle some deed needed in your community. The late Bishop of Alabama, Bill Stough, used to say “Listen to your gut.... what you feel there is often the Holy Spirit.” Whatever your gut is telling you to do .... don’t ignore it... do it.

For indeed... “whatever you do...,” you are doing for the One Who created you... and would there be any better use of your time, talent or treasure than that?

*Pro Fide,*

The Rev’d. Russell J. Levenson, Jr., D.Min, D.D., OStJ