Eyes on the Future

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRIOR

The late Nelson Mandela, Bailiff Grand Cross of The Most Venerable Order said, “Our human compassion binds us the one to the other—not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.” In this issue of Eyes on the Future I feel that each story beautifully illustrates the hope that fuels the actions of Confrères and our Order.

This past month has for many of us been a time of many transitions. As the containment of the spread of the coronavirus continues, many are starting to reunite with loved ones they have been isolated from, Christians have traveled through the excitement of the Easter season and celebrated its culmination in Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit. For many of us in the United States these have led or are leading to very welcome changes.

Yet as we experience this sense of “a light at the end of the tunnel” of pandemic uncertainty, many around the world see no such light, as yet another threat brings increased vulnerability and crushes any anticipation of relief.

As Confrères within the U.S. Priory who support St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group (SJEHG) and its life changing work, we are naturally aware of the many trials of the people of Israel and the Palestinian Territories. However, this past month the escalated violence and devastation, and the resulting human suffering in Jerusalem, Gaza, and the West Bank has cast an especially deep shadow over the light that we have felt blessed to see emerging at home.

Thousands of already vulnerable people in Gaza have lost their homes and livelihoods, creating a humanitarian crisis. Yet we remain determined to continue to treat all who seek ophthalmic care—especially the many displaced people, who having lost the little that they had are now unable to make even the smallest contribution to the urgent sight-saving treatment that they desperately need.

I thank Ahmad Ma’ali, the St John Eye Hospital CEO, for his regular updates, as well as David Verity, the Order Hospitaller, for his reports which enable me to keep you informed.

As I write this, Ahmad tells me that our clinical team in Jerusalem recently managed twenty-five casualties of whom seven needed eye removal at the Hospital and at other general hospitals where our doctors were needed due to the severe nature and multiple injuries sustained by the casualties. Despite security tensions in the West Bank, our medical staff has continued to provide services in Hebron, Anabta, Kofor and Aqab. While our outreach teams experience major challenges trying to reach their destinations, patients are still being seen and treated by our medical staff. Movement in Gaza has been very dangerous, so it was decided to deploy SJEHG staff to provide care at the governmental facilities. Our staff also established a hotline to provide consultations and advice to their patients.

The security and safety of the staff is paramount, and Ahmad was pleased to report that all our staff and their families are safe and unharmed. He once again, expressed gratitude for our “continued solidarity with the staff and support for the work we provide during these very difficult and unpredictable times,” I feel that it is we who should be thanking him!

As a Member of the U.S. Priory, you play an essential role in the hope that Ahmad and the SJEHG are able to extend to the people of the Holy Land, regardless of their religion, politics, race or social standing. When your donations fund a nurse or doctor, medical equipment or a facility improvement, you help prevent yet another person from losing their sight. As our Hospitaller often reminds us, sight-saving treatments change the life not only of the patient, but also the lives of all the interdependent family members. Curing blindness enables opportunity for independence, productivity, employment, dignity and against all odds, hope—not just for the individual, but over time for whole communities.

I thank the many of you who have already contacted me asking how you can help with the current crisis. At this time financial contributions are most welcome and can be forwarded directly through our website www.saintjohn.org, or our headquarters at 1850 M Street NW, Suite 1070, Washington, DC 2036. Please ensure that you identify your donation “Gaza Crisis.” Your generosity will help ensure that we sustain our existing services, while we also respond to the urgent immediate needs. Thank you.

I ask that as Members of The Most Venerable Order of St John we acknowledge our own blessings by continuing our centuries old tradition of devoting our time, talent and treasure to bring hope to the vulnerable, and most especially at this time to our sisters and brothers in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, through a generosity of prayer, action and funds.

Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum,
Nigel G. Heath, KStJ
Prior
Mohammad is a two-year-old boy from the Gaza Strip. He was born with cataracts and panuveitis, a severe eye inflammation which can cause blindness if untreated.

“The day he was born it was very hot and we have no electricity. He had red spots in his eyes, which I thought might be caused by the intensity of labor and the heat,” explained his mother.

When he was a week old, Mohammad’s eyes began to bleed. His mother took him to the St John Eye Hospital in Gaza, where doctors examined him and referred him to urgent care in Jerusalem.

Dr. Habes Batta, a pediatric ophthalmologist at St John Eye Hospital, treated Mohammad. He performed a lensectomy and anterior vitrectomy, as well as several surgeries to remove inflamed eye tissue.

As with many St John Eye Hospital patients, Mohammed’s mother faced the arduous task of securing permits to travel to Jerusalem for each surgical procedure.

On one visit they were waylaid in the hospital for nearly a month as they waited for religious holidays to end and the checkpoints to open back up again.

“It’s no secret what we are going through in Gaza, whether it is protests, the lack of electricity, blockades or continuous conflict,” she said.

“Having a child with chronic eye problems and being forced to leave Gaza in order to get him suitable treatment is very stressful, but I cannot thank the team at St John enough for the excellent care Mohammed has received,” she said.

Dr. Batta adds, “Mohammad’s case demonstrates the need to develop advanced eye care in the Gaza Strip, so our patients can avoid this stress and delay every time they come for surgery.”

It was a complicated case with a happy ending because today Mohammad has regained nearly all of his sight. This will give him the best start in life in a complicated region, all thanks to our donors.

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“Having a child with chronic eye problems and being forced to leave Gaza in order to get him suitable treatment is very stressful, but I cannot thank the team at St John enough for the excellent care Mohammed has received.”
ST JOHN AMBULANCE VOLUNTEERS CONTINUE TO PROVIDE SUPPORT TO THE NHS ACROSS THE UK

The roll-out of the vaccination program in the UK has been a major focus for The Most Venerable Order as an organization over the past few months. This new effort has not hindered the amazing work going on behind the scenes to help battle COVID-19 in hospitals and communities across the country. Volunteers are still tirelessly giving their time to support their National Health Service (NHS) colleagues outside of the vaccination centers, as they have been for the past year. The total number of hours that St John Ambulance volunteers and staff have selflessly dedicated to the NHS in the fight against Coronavirus has now reached a whopping 458,119. To put that into context, there are 8,760 hours in a calendar year.

How does it all break down?

• More than 298,200 hours have been given to the vaccination program since it started in January this year.
• 130,000 hours have been spent otherwise supporting the NHS in hospitals across the country, whether that be patient care, observations, the sorting of PPE or vital admin work.
• 52,300 hours have been dedicated to community response, through the likes of homelessness outreach, falls services and CFR work.
• 41,800 hours have been provided to the country’s slow, but steady, return to sports events, breathing life back into this important part of the economy.
• 136,500 hours have been spent by St John Ambulance emergency ambulance crews, backing up NHS Trusts and responding to 999 calls.

Adam Williams, St John Ambulance’s Head of Community Response, comments, “I could not be more proud of the work that St John Ambulance is doing right now. Our people are making a genuine difference. The vaccination program is bringing hope, and to be an integral part of it is amazing. But the hard work and dedication does not end there, to see so many hours of support given to the NHS is breathtaking. We can all see a light at the end of the tunnel now with restrictions starting to lift and vaccines being given at pace, but our work will continue well into the future, we will be on hand to support the NHS for months, even years to come.”

St John Ambulance volunteers ready for duty at the ExCel Centre Vaccination hub in London
EYE TO EYE WITH BRUCE SPIVEY, M.D.

by Lisa Mirza Grotts, reprinted from the San Francisco Regional Newsletter

**Towering Life.** When ophthalmologist Bruce Spivey became a member of the Order in 1999, he brought with him over 40 years of experience. As a trained ophthalmologist and medical educator, he has worked extensively to enhance ophthalmic education and eye care both nationally and internationally. His 40-page curriculum vitae gives credence to what a difference his work has made in the diagnosis, education and treatment of eye disorders. In fact, “four” seems to be his lucky number: he has received over 40 medals and awards, given over 40 named lectures and written over 140 scientific publications on the subject. He received the two top medals in American Ophthalmology and two prestigious medals in World Ophthalmology.

**War Years.** Bruce served in Vietnam from 1965-66 as Chief of Ophthalmology and Triage Officer. “For one year I was in the 85th Evacuation Hospital that was exactly like M*A*S*H except we had no football team. It was the most important year of my life because I learned more about myself and the reaction to change and stress. It also enlarged my knowledge of the developing world.” He also became the first ophthalmologist to treat 1100 patients in the leprosarium near Qui Nhon and saw local Vietnamese patients in the hospital run by nuns (Holy Family Hospital).

**High Achiever.** For 60 years, Bruce has dedicated his life to medicine. One title is a tall order, but not for him. He’s an MD, MS, MEd, KStJ, and a member of the St John Ophthalmic Association, plus a founding CEO, a chairman emeritus, and a past president of numerous organizations. His colleagues describe him as sincere, supportive, dedicated and innovative. According to Dr. Lester Jacobson, a California Pacific Medical Center cardiologist and former colleague, “I came here in 1975 when the hospital was a major heart center in San Francisco. That’s when I met Bruce. He was a bright and energetic young doctor who was just emerging on the national scene. It was clear from the get-go that he was a dynamo and a doer; someone who could get things accomplished. That was his reputation. When Bruce became a hospital administrator in the late 1970s, the campus flourished. He introduced new products, brought in some of the best doctors in the country and it was a wonderful atmosphere to work because he had an open door policy. You could talk to him about anything.”

**Expanding the St Johns Family.** There’s an old and famous saying, *Behind every successful man is a woman.* In Bruce’s case there are two: his wife Amanda (known as Gramanda to her four grandchildren) and his granddaughter Austin Spivey, both members of the Order. Amanda joined the Order in 1993 and became a Dame in 2003. She encouraged Bruce to join because of his involvement in ophthalmology and the hospital in Jerusalem. He was inducted in 1999. Dr. Spivey is proud of his midwestern values and like his Iowan roots, he considers himself plain and simple. He’s the first member of his family to go to college. Despite his modesty and infectious laugh, Bruce has made a significant impact in the field of medicine and on his granddaughter, Austin Spivey, who joined the Order in her mid-20s. “My grandfather has always been an inspiration and mentor,” said the young Spivey. “I look up to him for almost everything. He is kind, loving and handles everything with the utmost grace. He takes nothing for granted and is always the first to make you feel special.” Austin, who is the COO of an internet startup in Ireland, has followed in her grandfather’s footsteps with his own advice. “Work hard, hire people smarter and better than you, and give them full authority and responsibility.”

**Medicine Man.** When asked what his greatest contribution was in the field of ophthalmology, Bruce didn’t hesitate: “Creating major local, national and international organizations, and improving ophthalmic education worldwide.” Dr. Spivey continued on page 6
served as the first EVP and CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of the American Academy of Ophthalmology (1976-1992). He also served as CEO of California Pacific Medical Center 1976-1992. He was originally recruited to be Chief of Ophthalmology 1971-1987. He eventually became the CEO of the California Healthcare System 1986-1992, which included Marin, Alta-Bates and Mills-Peninsula, prior to joining Sutter Health. He then served as CEO of Northwestern Healthcare Network, a multi-hospital system in Chicago from 1992-1997. From 1997-2001, he was CEO of Columbia-Cornell Care in New York. He has been president of many national and international medical organizations, including the American Board of Medical Specialties; Council of Medical Specialty Societies; American Ophthalmological Society; the Society of Medical Administrators and the International Council of Ophthalmology. He is a founder of the Ophthalmic Mutual Insurance Company and is a trustee/director of many organizations including the International Council of Ophthalmology Foundation, Coe College, Pacific Vision Foundation and Helen Keller International. In 2019, Bruce was honored at the Pacific Vision Foundation gala for his 60 years in the field for providing high-quality eye care for all, regardless of means. He founded Pacific Vision while working as CEO of CPMC in the mid-1970s, and at the same time he helped establish the CPMC Foundation.

Service In The Order. Bruce was invested into the Order in 1999 and worked his way up the ranks to become a Knight in 2014. A Knight (or Dame) of St John is allowed their own Coat of Arms. He worked with the Heraldry in London, Jim Terzian, CStJ, his son and grandson to create a crest. The motto translates to discipline, hard work and good will. He continues to work on behalf of the Order as a member of The Chapter (Board) of the American Priory. Prior Nigel Heath summed up Bruce’s commitment to the Order in three words: time, talent and treasure. He’s been a generous and committed member whose life embodies the motto of the Order: For the Faith, In the Service of Humanity. He’s come a long way since his days as a medical intern in 1959 on a $115 monthly salary in Oakland, Ca.
According to contemporary witnesses, both men and women served in the Order’s first hospital in Jerusalem. After the fall of the holy city, a number of Hospitaller brothers and sisters retreated to Southern and Northern Europe where they founded religious communities, and there are accounts of English Sisters’ Houses as early as 1180. Hospitaller women have received little general study, and they are often represented in terms of holiness, while their male counterparts are portrayed militarily.

While joining holy orders was not a choice for some Hospitaller women, particularly those from noble backgrounds whose aristocratic or powerful families had forced them to join the Order for spiritual benefit, there is evidence that many women joined voluntarily simply because they wanted to. Belonging to a community of sisters could bring about a change in women’s lives in which they themselves might have found comfort—especially given that the order could potentially be a more privileged and safe space to be, which provided an independent alternative to marriage.

Not all women had to be wealthy to become sisters, although this would have been an advantage. There is often evidence that women from all walks of life would be admitted to the Houses, not by virtue of their financial situation but rather their skills, which might have matched the practical needs of specific Houses. Those skills ranged from baking and cooking, to farming and numeracy or literacy.

An Italian peasant girl, St Ubaldesca, was the daughter of a baker born in approximately 1136. From an impoverished background and lacking a dowry, her marriage prospects were limited, so at the age of 14 she travelled to Pisa to devote her life to serving others. Living with the sisters of the House of St John, Ubaldesca assisted the nuns in their holy rituals, but did not take a direct part in nursing the sick, as this was considered to be inconsistent with the religious vows made on committing to a holy order.

Ubaldesca died in 1205, and some time after 1268 she was canonized in recognition of her life devoted to charity, prayers and penitence. Among the miracles attributed to her, the most famous is the ability to turn the water in the well of the Church of the Santo Sepolcro, Pisa, into wine. In the portrait, St Ubaldesca is depicted wearing the robes of the Hospitaller sisters, decorated with the white cross that continues to be the mark of the Order of St John. Her penitent expression alludes to a life spent begging for alms, while surviving on a diet of bread and water.
RESILIENCE AND THE PRIORY CHURCH

It was in 1185, in the presence of King Henry II and Hospitaller Grand Master Roger de Moulins, that Patriarch Heraclius of Jerusalem dedicated the Priory Church at the Order of St John’s headquarters in Clerkenwell. The church was then marked by a 65-foot diameter round nave characteristic of Hospitaller and Templar churches. For the next 800 years, the fabric of the church building changed with the times as parts of it were enlarged, embellished and demolished. It was 80 years ago that it suffered one of its greatest misfortunes. Overcoming that damage in 1941 is a wonderful lesson in the resilience of our Order and the work that we continue to do around the world.

After King Henry VIII broke with Rome and dissolved the monasteries of England, the great medieval Priory Church fell into disrepair. The building’s fortunes rose and fell as new efforts to revive and reuse the structure came and went. By the early 18th century, it had been reconsecrated as a parish church. Over the next 100 years it began to rebuild its association with the Order of St John, which was reestablished in the form we know during the early 19th century. By the 1870s, the revived Order of St John had purchased the nearby St John’s Gate and begun transforming the religious building into the church of the Grand Priory. After the Order received its Royal Charter in 1888, extensive restoration work was done on the Gate and the Church, overseen by J. Oldrid Scott. The church retained its Georgian decorations and features for the next several decades until calamity struck during the last major raid of the London Blitz in 1941.

The Nazis conducted mass air attacks against industrial targets, towns, and cities from September 1940. Overnight on May 10, 1941, more than 500 bombers dropped their payloads over London, in their last effort to demoralize the British in the Blitz. In one night, more than 1,000 people were killed and more than 10,000 homes were destroyed. A 1kg incendiary bomb pierced the roof of the Priory Church, setting fire to the wooden fixtures and furniture inside. A heroic effort from firefighters saved the walls of the church and the medieval crypt, but everything else was consumed in the blaze.

But as has happened so often in the Priory Church’s history, that was not the end of the story. Though the Blitz was over, the war continued on for four more years. Even so, in 1943 plans were made to rebuild the church. Ninian Comper, the noted Gothic Revival architect, was called on to create a design for a grand church that would showcase the medieval heritage of the Order of St John. His design was striking and very ambitious. The extravagant proposal featured an octagonal tower with a free-standing altar encircled by a two-tier colonnade of classical columns. The expense, though, proved too much for the austere post-war years and other architects were eventually brought in to complete the work.

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In the meantime, the religious life of the Order continued. Services were held in the Priory Church crypt and some were even held in the open-air ruins of the church. On St John's Day 1947—more than six years after the church had been ruined—Henry Montgomery Campbell, Bishop of Kensington, was presiding over a service reminding members of the Order and other worshippers that even after the last bomb has fallen, the effects of war continue to be felt.

Eventually, the Priory Church was rebuilt. Though not as grand as Comper’s proposal, the plan of John Seely and Paul Paget, who had recently been appointed to restore St John’s Gate, was approved in November 1951. This led to the restoration and rebuilding of the church as it is seen today. The sanctuary of Seely and Paget’s church is spartan without Comper’s gothic embellishments, but the simple white walls and the uncluttered accoutrements provide a place of quiet contemplation of our Order’s mission. Visitors’ eyes are drawn upward by the remaining tracery windows to consider their part in the wider efforts “For the Faith” and “In the Service of Humanity.” They can also see the armorial banners of those who have dedicated their lives to that service. It may not be a riot of ornamentation, but the Priory Church remains as a symbol of the work of our Order and its resilience over the centuries!
What might our Patron Saint John ask us to ponder at this historic moment?

We are all saying it these days … “There is a light at the end of the tunnel.” As we see early signs of the end of this long season of pandemic … the beginning of the end draws nigh.

What might our Patron Saint John ask us to ponder at this historic moment?  *Do I need repent?*

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John” the story goes. And what is his message?  “Repent!” Almost seems like an intrusion into our hopes for what rests beyond this pandemic but, nevertheless, there he is … wild haired, bearded, locust-eating, robe-wearing prophet pointing the way to God—with that word “Repent!”

Coming to terms with what might seem like a hard invitation (admonition?) of John might seem a bit painful.  But, as spiritualist Anthony de Mello wrote, “Every painful event contains in itself a seed of growth and liberation.”

Sometimes we children of God need a spiritual 2x4 to the senses to get to the heart of the matter. John taunted the outwardly religious by warning against replacing a real relationship with God with a false sense of security in their bloodline. While it was certainly possible to have a relationship with God and be a Jew, simply having Abraham as their “Patriarch” did not a relationship with God make. That is why John the Baptist cut to the chase and called them a “Brood of Vipers.” They may have been religious, but they bore no fruit of a truly religious life. To the Tax Collectors, he said, “Do your job and take only what is fair.” Then the Roman soldiers, well known for extorting money out of civilians, were told “Knock it off.”

But these were a kind of outward push toward the much bigger issue John raised. He was saying to everyone, “Take a look at your life … what kind of fruits is it bearing … are you greedy … do you hoard … are you falsely pious … do you rob the government … or your neighbor? If so … then you need to repent.” John does not just tell them—he shows them.

John the Baptist had the opportunity to take center stage and refused. As John grew in popularity, the crowds also grew. It must have been a terribly tempting moment when they began asking, “So John, are you … are you the Messiah?” But John resisted that temptation— “… Someone is coming… He’s so much more powerful than I am … in fact … I am not even worthy to stoop down and tie His sandals.” He would later say, “He must increase and I must decrease.”

The end of this pandemic has not yet arrived, but as we make our way down the track toward that opening – we can use the waning days of our voyage out to ponder whether or not we are willing to follow not just John’s call—but his way.

You and I were created chiefly to be objects of God’s love, and agents of that love.

As objects, we are welcomed to take hold of Augustine's words, “God loves each person as if that one was the only one who ever existed, and God loves all, as He loves each.”

Having received that love, we are not called to hoard it—but share it—in our words and our ways—for we privileged members of the Order, *Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum* is not just our motto—it is our *modus operandi*.

But John knew what got in the way of accepting God’s love and sharing it as well—the one in the mirror. So the word “repent,” is not so much an ancient word with no value to the 21st Century human—but should be a welcome word to rid the heart and soul of those things that keep us from being who God calls us to be and what He calls us to do!

The Rev. Francis J. Grimke was one of the most revered African American Preachers of the last century. On Sunday, November 3, 1918, as our nation was coming to the end of the Spanish Flu, he preached a memorable sermon at the 15th Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. If you have the time, I urge you to track it down, I have included a link below. 2 Poignantly, you could replace the words “Spanish Flu,” with “Covid-19,” and the sermon would work just as well today.

He suggested that to fail to take stock in one's faith in the face of tremendous adversity is a squandered opportunity.

“… if faith is to help us; if it is to put its great strong arms under us; if we are to feel its sustaining power under such distressing

1 John 3:30.

circumstances, it must be a real, living faith in God—it must be the genuine article—a faith that works, that works by love, and that purifies the heart…. I still feel that one important function of this epidemic will be lost if it fails to have that effect upon us, if it does not lead to careful heart-searching on our part….”

I suppose that is a long way of saying what John said, “repent… decrease… so that He might increase for your sake and for the sake of the world…. “

If we take the medicine of John within ourselves—who knows? What might really be more important than the beginning of the end—is the beginning at the end—as we commit to starting life anew—afresh… by bringing the love that has been so liberally lavished upon us to all those the good Lord sends our way.

Indeed, *Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum.*
The Rev. Dr. Russell J. Levenson, Jr., MStJ
Sub-Prelate

“Almighty God, by whose providence thy servant John the Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of thy Son our Savior by preaching repentance: Make us so to follow his doctrine and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching; and after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the Truth’s sake; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.”

The Collect for The Nativity of Saint John the Baptist
24 June

**“THE SPIRITUALITY OF CHIVALRY” VIDEOS**

A virtual spiritual retreat was held via Zoom in April. The Spirituality of Chivalry event was jointly sponsored by the Johanniter Subcommandery of the U.S., and the Charleston Region of the U.S. Priory.

For easy reference, the recorded event has been broken into seven sections. Click the links below to watch.

**Part 1: Introduction and comments by U.S. Prior Nigel Heath, KStJ, and Balley Delegate to the U.S. Rainer Köhler, K.J.**

**Part 2: First Lecture – The Spirituality of Chivalry**

**Part 3: Second Lecture – A Knight’s Tale: Service & Soul in the Order**

**Part 4: Third Lecture – Put on the Full Armor of God and Stand Firm**

**Part 5: Panel Discussion**

**Part 6: Questions for the Panel**

**Part 7: Closing and Benediction**