

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

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 6

AUGUST 2021



Michael's Story

PAGE 3

HIGHLIGHTS

The U.S. Priory's
Strategic Plan

PAGE 4

Petition for Your Own
Coat of Arms

PAGE 5

The Symbolism of the
Order's White Cross

PAGE 7



MESSAGE FROM THE PRIOR

It is the recognized desire to selflessly serve others by sharing our own gifts of time, talent and treasure to benefit others that may lead to membership of the Order.

Service has always been at the very core of our Order. From its earliest beginnings through its centuries of struggles, triumphs, and reemergence from decline to its modern global expansion, service is what unites our Members throughout history and around the world. It is the recognized desire to selflessly serve others by sharing our own gifts of time, talent and treasure to benefit others that may lead to membership of the Order.

Being accepted and invested into the Order is the greatest honor The Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem can bestow. It is in many ways a unique honor, as it is awarded not only in recognition of what you have already done, but also as a recognition and encouragement for the service you are expected to accomplish going forward. Becoming a Member means accepting the duties and responsibilities of the Order. It is a serious commitment. Just as it was for the earliest brothers and sisters in medieval Jerusalem, so it is for us today.

Always, at the center of our Investiture Weekend, is the Service of Investiture and Rededication.

While it is full of pageantry and ceremony, this is not merely for decoration. It also reminds us that we are all part of a noble legacy to which we have made a solemn commitment to protect and continue. We are an order that welcomes

people of all and no faith, so long as all accept and uphold the Christian values and principles on which we are founded. When Members of all traditions are invested, they are reminded of their commitment to serve others.

Yet despite this expectation of humble service, the Order takes appropriate delight in celebrating those who endeavor to fulfill its mission. The U.S. Priory has, until now, achieved this primarily through promotions, certificates of recognition and various appointments. The U.S. Priory soon will be able to present another recognition. The prestigious Service Medal of the Order is an international award given to those who dedicate themselves to continuous voluntary service consistent with the Rules and Regulations of the Order. It is anticipated that the first Order Service Medals will be presented by the U.S. Priory in 2022. I look forward to being able to explain more about eligibility, qualifying criteria and requisite requirements in the near future.

The projects we start at a young age often determine where our charitable and philanthropic involvement will focus as adults. Another new, but quite different emphasis on service is the St John Volunteer Corps *Kards for Kids* initiative. This project enables our youngest family members to join us in service to *our Lords the sick and the poor*. No one speaks the language of children more effectively than children themselves. So all Confrères are encouraged to work with the children in their families to create a handmade card or two, decorated with a cheerful and loving image. These will be handed to young patients at our St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital to help bring a smile and dispel some of the understandable anxiety at their ophthalmic appointments. Contact your Regional Chair for a more detailed explanation and all the relevant information.

I look forward to seeing you in person in Boston. Don't forget to bring your *Kards for Kids*!

Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum,
Nigel G. Heath, KStJ
Prior

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VIDEO



MICHAEL'S STORY

Michael sells souvenirs to tourists in the Holy Land, and his income supports three generations of his family. He was going blind and barely able to function at work, until he got help from St John Eye Hospital.

NEW AND IMPROVED MEMBER DASHBOARD

If you have visited the Member Section of the Priory website (www.saintjohn.org) recently, you have noticed the customized Member Dashboard that appears when you log in. In keeping with the Priory's goal of greater transparency, the new Dashboard was created to provide Members with current information about their contact information and the history of their contributions to the U.S. Priory.

This self-service tool is continually evolving to meet the needs of Members, and recently added the capability to access tax acknowledgement letters for each contribution. So if you are

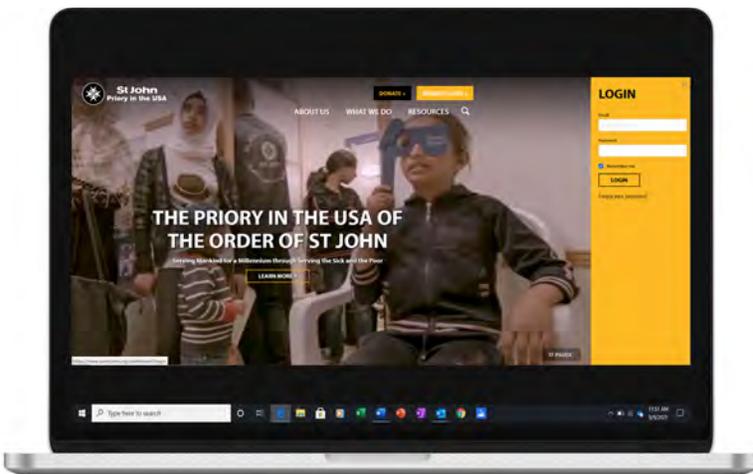
working to file your taxes on a Saturday afternoon and need a tax acknowledgment letter, you no longer have to wait until Monday to contact the Priory office for the information. You simply log in to the Member Section of the Priory website, locate the contribution on your Dashboard and click on the corresponding tax letter icon. You may either download the letter or print a copy for your files.

The historic practice of the Priory office has been to mail a hard copy of these tax letters for each contribution. With the development of this new electronic capability, and in keeping with the Priory's efforts to deliver faster and more cost-efficient services, the mailing of these letters has been phased out. All tax acknowledgment letters will now be delivered electronically, except where specific special accommodations are necessary. As always, the Priory office is available to assist during this transition.

Coming soon: electronic recordkeeping for the St John Volunteer Corps (SJVC) volunteer hours. ❄️

PLEASE NOTE

All tax acknowledgment letters will now be delivered electronically, except where specific special accommodations are necessary.



UPDATE ON THE U.S. PRIORY'S STRATEGIC PLAN

Last fall, the Chapter approved a new Strategic Plan setting five-year goals for the Priory. The plan, which is posted on the member Dashboard of the Priory website and can be found [here](#), also includes updated statements of our mission, vision and values. The Strategic Planning Committee, chaired by Dennis Hensley, KStJ, developed the plan as the new Priory leadership team assumed its duties. Over 16 meetings, the Committee analyzed data from 500 Members' survey responses and some 30 interviews. Members are united in strong support of the Priory, but areas needing attention were identified. The Chapter and Standing Committees are taking responsibility for implementing the plan and much progress has already been made.

Broadly, the plan focuses the Priory back onto service to the sick and the poor, in our communities, at the St John Eye Hospital and around the world. The plan also emphasizes substance over form. As Members we have a duty to take our commitment seriously through our contribution of time, talent and treasure; candidates for appointment should have a history of service; the Priory should facilitate closer fellowship among Members; and Priory governance should demonstrate substantive credibility, transparency and responsiveness.

Here is just a brief summary of the five main points of the plan:

Increase support for the Eye Hospital and the U.S. Priory.

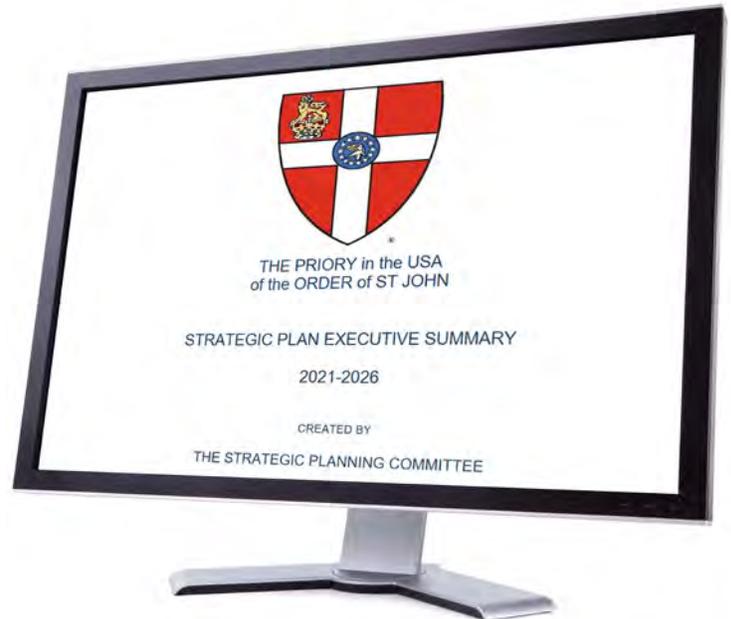
This goal expands on our past approach, focusing on our impact on people's lives and the robust efforts needed to increase that impact. To maximize impact, every Member should pay the annual Oblation. Members (83% of survey respondents) broadly support the Eye Hospital, but challenges exist. Only a quarter of Members consider the Priory one of their top charities.

Expand the Volunteer Corps to make it more attractive to Members and provide a greater contribution to the sick and the poor.

Three-fourths of Members want to volunteer but only 13% do so. We must reimagine the Corps so Members can more easily find volunteer opportunities which directly benefit our communities.

Actively identify, educate and sponsor outstanding new Members.

A much stronger process is needed for identifying and sponsoring highly qualified candidates with a demonstrated history of service. Prospective candidates should participate in fellowship programs where they interact with Members, ensuring they are widely known and fully endorsed within the Priory and their Region. We must clarify the duties of each Member sponsoring a candidate — duties that continue after a candidate is invested.



Changes to achieve this goal have strong support with 92% of survey respondents saying candidates must be committed to the Order's values (including financial support). Over half of Members say an interest in royal patronage alone does not justify admission. The Committee concluded that changes were needed "to reduce the possibility of people joining the Order for status, publicity or self-aggrandizement rather than to help the sick and the poor."

Provide a wide range of opportunities to deepen member fellowship. Over 40% of Members have little engagement with the Priory, often because they lack meaningful relationships with other Members. We must expand opportunities for Members to develop those relationships.

Maximize effectiveness of US Priory governance and communications. A third of Members see a lack of transparency in governance and decision-making. We must revise the Priory's governance and culture to increase transparency and responsiveness to Members and maintain a credible protocol for the promotion and recognition of members.

The full plan contains a lot of valuable information, which cannot be presented here. Members are encouraged to read it. ✨

LETTERS PATENT AND PETITIONING FOR YOUR OWN COAT OF ARMS

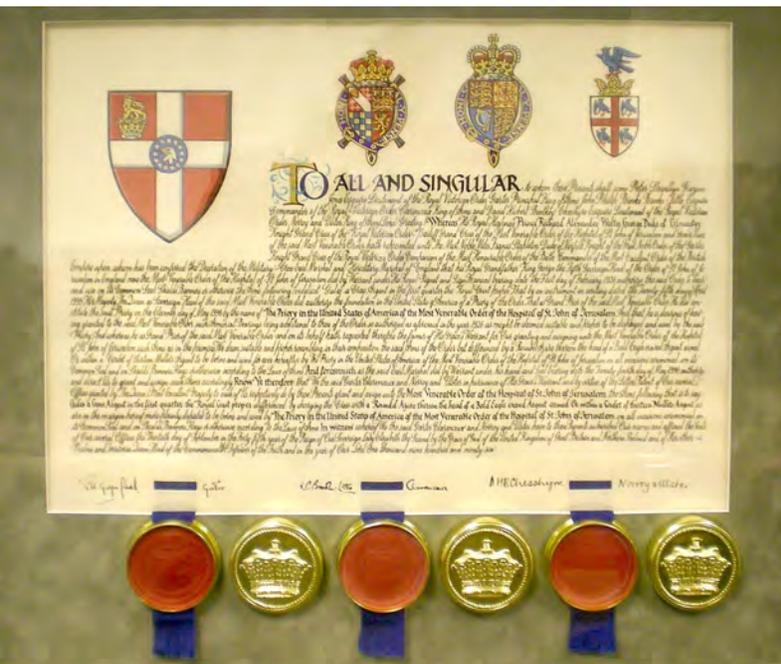
Imagine that it is the Middle Ages and you are a proverbial knight in shining armor. You rush onto the field of battle and realize that you cannot tell who anyone is. Just as your face is covered by your great helmet, so are those of your adversaries ... and your allies.

This is the predicament that helped spark the development of heraldry. To help identify each other, knights put unique symbols on banners, surcoats and shields so that they would know who to attack and who to help on the battlefield or during tournaments. To many, these pretty shields are an anachronism, but if you have attended an Order of St John Investiture, you have seen heraldry in action. Each of the Order's 11 Priories has its own coat of arms and many of the highest-ranking officers of the Order have banners of their arms hanging in the Priory Church in Clerkenwell. But heraldry is not something reserved only for these leaders of the Order. There is a long history of regular people across Europe bearing coats of arms to identify themselves and their descendants.

She and her son, Brett, met Thomas (now Sir Thomas) Woodcock, Garter King of Arms, in 2019 at the College of Arms premises near St Paul's Cathedral. "Brett had just started his Ph.D. at the University of Cambridge at that time and he and I together came up with the unique design for my coat of arms, my badge and our Latin motto." Bita and Brett truly enjoyed the collaborative, creative process. "We tried to include themes and ideas that remind us of our heritage and life experiences. Mr. Woodcock was so kind and welcoming as he guided us through the process, which took approximately one year." After working to develop a design that followed the conventions of heraldry, the grant of arms was made with a hand-painted and engrossed vellum patent. "My patent, of which I am most proud, is now framed and displayed at our home. I cannot wait to use my coat of arms on jewelry and other decorations and art to display at my home and office."

continued on page 6

The College of Arms in London



The U.S. Priory's Letters Patent, on display in the Washington, D.C. office

At the College of Arms in London, Her Majesty's heralds keep alive the great tradition of designing, granting and recording coats of arms. The senior heralds, called Kings of Arms, are tasked with making grants of new Arms to people and institutions who are respected members of their communities. Those who have been honored with membership in an order of chivalry such as the Order of St John are automatically considered eligible for a grant of Arms. Dr. Bitá Esmaeli, OSTJ, is a member of the American Priory who recently went through the process and was granted a coat of arms of her own.



At the College of Arms in London, Her Majesty's heralds keep alive the great tradition of designing, granting and recording coats of arms.

The process of receiving a grant from the College of Arms begins by working with an Officer of Arms in London. Peter O'Donoghue is Her Majesty's York Herald of Arms and helps would-be armigers navigate the process of petitioning for a grant of arms. He has particularly enjoyed his many experiences working with American grantees.

The first step in the grant process, which an Officer of Arms walks people through, is drafting and submitting a formal petition to the Earl Marshal. According to York Herald, "The Earl Marshal then issues a Warrant instructing the Kings of Arms to make the grant. We then turn to a discussion of the design of the new arms. We aim to grant good, simple coats of arms with clear, bold ideas that work well at a distance

as well as in detail." These basic principles, of course, are common to many fields of design, and have served heraldry well for centuries. The elements included in the actual design represent ancestries, careers, passions, achievements, experiences or interests. Luckily, you do not need to have any knowledge of heraldry to undertake the process. "The Officer of Arms acting as agent will guide the grantee through this process and will explain anything that is unclear. Sketches are prepared for the grantee to approve, and the design then goes before the Kings of Arms, who have the final approval over coats of arms that they grant."

The finished product is a remarkable artifact. "The grant of arms itself is made by means of a formal legal document engrossed by hand on a large sheet of vellum." This is an amazingly long-lasting material that will beautifully show the arms for generations. "It is hand-illuminated by the College's heraldic artists. The wax seals of the granting Kings



Dr. Bitá Esmali, OSTJ, with her letters patent and coat of arms.

of Arms are attached at the foot. This document is called a Letters Patent, meaning that it is a public act on behalf of the Sovereign. A full copy is kept in the official records of the College of Arms, and the original goes to the grantee." Just as Bitá did, many people have these framed for display.

Adding color and variety to the background of our lives, heraldry is something that many members of the U.S. Priory have embraced with enthusiasm. At Investiture weekend in Boston, be sure to keep an eye out for heraldic displays from armigerous members. If you want to find out more about heraldry and pursue a grant for yourself, contact Jim Terzian, CStJ, U.S. Priory Genealogist at jimterzian@live.com. ❄️

SYMBOLISM AND THE WHITE CROSS

Symbols help people understand the world. Whether considering gestures, signs, words, or objects, symbols convey meaning to the communities and cultures they reach. In the Order of St John we see symbols everywhere. For example, the red banner with a white cross and Royal Crest quickly shows the hospitaller roots of our Order and its royal connections. Perhaps the most ubiquitous symbol we see is the one that graces the mantles and badges worn in service of the Order.

The Maltese cross used by the mutually-recognized Orders of St John is itself a symbol of connection to merchants from the Amalfi coast of Italy. These wealthy merchants helped to finance the original medieval hospital in Jerusalem and the cross was adopted as a symbol of thanks. Once the Amalfi cross became the Maltese cross, members of the hospitaller Orders began assigning more symbolic meaning to the symbol. The white came to stand for purity of calling and purpose while the four main arms of the cross came to represent the four cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude. Some of the earliest meanings assigned to the points were knightly virtues to remind those in the Order how to live. These called knights to have faith and be sincere, to be humble and just. Meanwhile, each of the eight points of the cross was given its own meaning. The points were sometimes said to represent the eight ancient languages or geographical divisions of the hospitallers: Provence, Auvergne, France, Italy, Aragon, England (with Scotland and Ireland),



Germany, and Castille. The points were also said to represent the eight Beatitudes—blessings recounted by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. Well-known by many, these remind Knights and Dames to be poor in spirit, to mourn their sins, to be meek, to be righteous, to be merciful, to be pure, to bring peace and to be willing to suffer persecution.

These ideals are what all true Christians strive for. As the Order of St John in the British Empire became a global force for first aid training, other meanings were attached to the symbol of the Maltese cross. For St John Ambulance, the points represent the qualities of a good first aider—tact, resourcefulness, dexterity, sympathy, perseverance, discrimination, explicitness and observation. Our Order of St John is not alone in assigning such meanings to the cross. The Johanniter Orde in Nederland, the Dutch member of the Alliance, uses the cross to remind knights of their own chivalric duties. The Dutch virtues (*hulp, zorg, rechtvaardigheid, integriteit, vrede, geloof, medeleven and bescheidenheid*) can be translated as help, care, justice, integrity, peace, faith, compassion and modesty.

Again, symbols help us understand that world. From Malta to Canberra and from Amsterdam to Washington, the objects that we employ can convey meaning to our communities. They give us insight into what our Orders stand for and how we can live out our mission, *for the faith, and in the service of humanity.* ✨

THE RHODES MISSAL

The Rhodes Missal is an illuminated manuscript on vellum, from 1504.

Within its covers are 108 pages, each handwritten in Latin and decorated with gilded and colored illuminations. The pages are further enhanced with 28 hand-drawn illustrations charting the stories of the Gospels, and with musical scores of Medieval religious chants.

The Rhodes Missal is a unique object that exemplifies the religious devotion and artistic patronage of the Knights of the order of St John, during their time on the island of Rhodes when their power and influence stretched across Europe.

The story of the Rhodes Missal can be found in the book *Treasures*, available for purchase in the Priory giftshop [here](#). ✨





PRO FIDE

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..."
Mark 10:45

I am nearing 60 years old; have been an ordained priest for nearly 30 and a disciple of Jesus for many more years beyond that. And yet, even after years of reading and studying the old, old story, there are still times when I pick up my Bible and am stunned by the extraordinary nuggets of wisdom that spring out to me in fresh ways as if I had never before heard them.

Such is the little nugget from Mark's Gospel above. Astounding that the God of the Universe would humble Himself to live among us; but even more astounding that His life would be chiefly characterized not in words like power, success or wealth, but in humility, in sacrifice in service. Mark tells us here, words that Jesus embodied—the whole aim of Jesus' life was to serve others. As followers of the Great Servant, we are held to the same call. But what does it mean to really serve?

Some years ago, a friend described to me a conversation he had with a colleague about the lesson she learned from throwing a surprise party for her husband. The husband's fiftieth birthday was approaching, and months in advance, she began to make careful plans for a major, A #1 blowout. A facility was reserved, a band hired, invitations to old friends, mentors and colleagues were sent out, and when the day finally arrived, the wife could not wait to see the look on her husband's face.

When they arrived at the restaurant for what the husband thought was going to be a rather quiet evening, the doors opened and hundreds of guests yelled in excitement, "Surprise!" It was a carefully planned, splendid celebration.

After the event, as the couple were on their way home, she noticed her husband unusually quiet. As they got ready for bed, she finally asked her husband, "Is everything all right?" He told her what a great evening it was, and how very much he appreciated her attention to details and all of her time and energy. But then he said, "*You know honey, what you really did was plan the kind of party you would have liked. You know what I would really like to have done was simply get together with a few of our friends for an intimate meal and conversation.*"

I am not quite sure what happened after that (!), but my friend made an interesting observation. It grew out of some of those mailings he had received pushing another credit card on him. He noted that there now seemed to be a step above the "Gold Visa" or "Gold Mastercard," and it was the "Platinum Card." He said he believed that the wife was living out the Golden Rule, "*Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you.*" Of

course, that is not all bad. But then he suggested that perhaps another step ought to be taken, that perhaps what we need is a "Platinum Rule," which says, "*Do unto others, as they would like to have done to them.*" In other words, learn to put other's desires and needs above your own. That, it seems to me, is the deepest expression of sacrificial service.

There's a wonderful old story of a man who dreamed one night he died and was given a chance to visit both heaven and hell. In his dream though, the one thing that death did to people was to stiffen their elbows. No one in either realm could bend their arms; they were forced to live with their arms outstretched. In hell, he saw a large group gathered around a table—there was great conflict and everyone was agitated—each person had bread in both hands, but remained hungry because given the stiffness of their elbows, they couldn't get it to their mouths. Each one person was only concerned for him or herself and misery was piled on misery.

But, in Heaven, where all the humans had the same physical disability, the people had discovered a solution. Although they could not feed themselves with those stiffened arms, they could feed each other!

They had discovered how to step from this kingdom to the next, giving way, letting go, There's the real difference between heaven and hell—turning in upon ourselves, or letting go and allowing our love to pour out generously into the lives of those around us.

What will you do with your arms today? Who needs you to quit pushing them away with your own self-interest, and instead let those stiffened arms melt into a selfless embrace? Most assuredly it includes those who need to be fed, clothed, cared for, just loved. Step a bit closer to home and maybe it is your wife? Your husband? A child, a friend, maybe a workmate, maybe someone you will meet tomorrow or after Church. Or maybe it is the Lord Jesus Christ who you know, right now, is calling you to quit pushing Him away and let Him embrace you as you are.

As we emerge from a long season of isolation, when we have individually spent much more time on meeting our own personal needs above those of others, perhaps we should let Jesus' word and example speak to us today, to find true meaning and purpose in life, not by being served, but by serving, and not by making our chief aim the Golden Rule, but the Platinum Rule. And if you are finding that hard, turn to the One who did that perfectly. He is always there to help you along. (Matthew 28:20).

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