Eyes on the Future

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRIOR

In this issue of *Eyes on the Future* we celebrate The Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem by looking at who we are, and what we do, as Confrères around the world.

In the spotlight on Col. (ret) Donald Gray Hepner, M.D., KStJ, known less formally simply as Gray to his many friends, we hear from a Confrère with much experience in the world of infectious diseases and vaccine development. As we start to feel some relief from the restraints of COVID-19 protocols, he gives us his perspective of what this means for us as individuals, members of a respected worldwide health providing organization and for the future of humankind. This is a time of reflection for us all.

On the pages that follow you will find stories of about who we are, not only here in the USA, but around the world, and about how we do what we do, as well as how we celebrate it.

For almost a thousand years our Order has committed to reach out to all who need our help and to each other in community. It is our Order’s commitment not to discriminate on grounds of race, religion or status that most inspires me in my endeavors to lead and support our Priory. As I write this, I am preparing for in-person visits to our Headquarters, gatherings with Confrères in Washington, DC, Richmond, Virginia, New York City and Greenwich, Connecticut. I very much look forward to meeting many of you in person next week, and to many more of you in Boston for our service of Investiture and Rededication.

A major initiative that I have been working on with our Registrar is the introduction of the St John Service Medal. This is a prestigious honor bestowed by Her Majesty The Queen for Members who have performed the qualifying service of 60 hours per year, properly recorded and certified for a period of 10 years, to the Order of St John. My goal is that our Priory will make the first awards in the 2022 honors cycle and present the first medals as part of Hospital’s 140th Anniversary celebration at Investiture in Houston.

Like our patron saint, John the Baptist, we as Confrères recognize that we are called to serve and not to lord; as our ancient motto to serve our Lords the sick and the poor constantly reminds us. In our service we endeavor to be the embodiment of Christ’s unconditional love for all, as contemplated in the article by Russ Levinson, the Priory’s Sub-Prelate.

*Pro Fide,*
Nigel G. Heath, KStJ
Prior
AN INFECTIOUS DISEASE SPECIALIST’S TAKE ON COVID-19

After 33 years focusing on infectious disease control, Col. (ret.) D. Gray Heppner, MD, KStJ, says, "Infectious disease knows no boundaries. But after the Romans with soap and clean water, vaccines are the single most cost-effective medical intervention we’ve ever had."

Gray received his MD from the University of Virginia, studied internal medicine at the University of Minnesota, and went on to focus on infectious disease at the Center for Vaccine Development at the University of Maryland. Gray has conducted clinical trials of malaria vaccines in the U.S., Asia, and Africa. He’s also a former Hospitaller for the U.S. Priory, and a co-founder and former vice chancellor of the St John Volunteer Corps.

During the pandemic Gray has worked as the chief medical officer of a biotechnology company to develop COVID-19 vaccines for developing countries. The company recently conducted phase one and two trials in Taiwan, and is about to begin conducting trials in India. "If you look at the global mismatch of need and vaccine rollout, you have this paradoxical situation in much of South America, Asia and Africa where you have societies that have been devastated due to a lack of vaccines, while we have vaccine excess and vaccine refusal in Western nations."

Gray says people in the United States are lucky to have easy access to vaccines, not just against COVID-19. "My grandfather was one of nine children. Two died of infectious diseases before the age of two, and he lost two of his uncles to tuberculosis. That’s the sort of thing you don’t hear about anymore, because of vaccines."

For those who have gotten COVID-19 vaccinations, Gray still advises caution. "COVID has evolved with the new variants. There is real concern that everyone’s immunity will decrease over time, and their immunity to the new strains is less than it was to the old strain. I think it’s all about risk/benefit. It does look like all the vaccines protect against severe disease, which is really important, so it’s a question of how you balance the risk of mild and moderate disease."

“This term that’s been popularized, ‘long haulers,’ is a real phenomenon. It’s devastating to have the fatigue, the pulmonary disease and some psychiatric and neurologic complications that can plague COVID-19 survivors. You shouldn’t minimize it or say it’s just a problem for older people that have diabetes or any of the other recognized comorbidities. It’s a devastating disease.”

Gray says if someone has gotten a single (Janssen) or two-dose (Moderna, Pfizer) COVID-19 vaccine, that recent shot likely won’t be, or shouldn’t be, the last. "I’m not saying anything radical here. I think it’s common sense. People are going to need boosters, and the booster vaccines should be tailored to the current strains. It’s much like flu. Despite the pronouncements early on that COVID-19 wouldn’t mutate, it has. Even if you’ve had COVID-19, you really should get a vaccine. Follow the CDC’s advice, and when the boosters come out, get them."

Gray encourages people not to be dissuaded by social or mainstream media horror stories. “All vaccines have risk and benefit. It’s unfortunate when vaccines are available, and the risk to benefit clearly favors their use, that there would be politicization and irrational discourse hyped by sensationalist journalists. I think the media has fallen down in terms of presenting rational arguments from credible sources. I would encourage everyone to consult their physicians.”

Gray says the global response to the pandemic has for the most part been impressive. “Look at the improved ability to make vaccines quickly, overcoming technological hurdles and regulatory pathways. This was nothing short of a miracle."

It’s the kind of response that could be needed again sometime in the near or distant future. Gray, who is also a member of the National Biodefense Science Board, says, “We’re so good at making vaccines against known threats, but the World Health Organization (WHO) talks about ‘Disease X,’ a new, lethal disease for which there is no previous vaccine. It doesn’t exist, continued on page 4
but it’s on the WHO top 10 list of diseases, and they put it there as an encouragement to prepare now.”

So the worldwide response to COVID-19 could set the stage for a better response to a future Disease X, whatever it may be. Gray says with COVID-19 a lot of lessons were learned about social distancing and masks, and about the mass creation and distribution of vaccines.

While he continues to play a significant roll in the fight against COVID-19, Gray is quick to say he’s not on the front lines. “I’m not seeing patients. We (the U.S. Priory) are rich in front line workers, especially medical personnel from oncologists to ophthalmologists to nurses, and I think those people who have continued to see patients are real heroes. The heart of the Order goes back to the statement in the Bible, ‘To whom much is given, much is required.’ That’s one of the things that makes the Order so special. It’s not just Oblations and pilgrimages to the hospital. It’s really about people who serve others. Our Confrères are people who are privileged that have considerable talents, and they continue to give of themselves. They know the true satisfaction of helping others here and abroad during a time of crisis.”

**JANAT’S AND MOHAMMAD’S STORY**

Janat and Mohammad are siblings from Ramallah who suffer from Leber’s Congenital Armaurosis, an inherited disorder causing vision loss and night blindness.

They have two older siblings who are blind as a result of this progressive condition. Because their parents are first cousins, a myriad of health conditions can occur, including a number of ophthalmic conditions.

There is hope, however for Janat and Mohammad. Thanks to the St John Eye Hospital Genetic Research Clinic, a DNA study found that a mutation in the RPE65 gene was shared among family members.

Fortunately, a gene therapy treatment has been approved. This treatment has the potential to prevent the condition from getting worse.

Although it is a very expensive treatment, testing and treatment are provided for free, thanks to the generous support of St John Eye Hospital donors. The parents will also be able to use this diagnosis to take precautionary steps for any future children they may have.

**STATS**

Almost 50% of marriages among Palestinians are consanguineous (people descending from the same ancestor). St John Eye Hospital Group has been spreading awareness of the genetic dangers through social media and outreach.
BOSTON INVESTITURE 2021

The Service of Investiture and Rededication Weekend in Boston, Massachusetts, scheduled for September 10-12th is around the corner, and preparations for this exciting event are well underway! Many of you have reserved your rooms at the host hotel, the Fairmont Copley Plaza, where many of the Weekend’s events will take place. Alternate hotels are also available for guests who wish to reserve a room.

Confrères have begun receiving their invitations and enthusiastically confirming their attendance. In addition to the memorable Investiture Service held at Trinity Church, the Weekend’s event schedule includes notable events such as the Welcome Reception, Gala Benefit Dinner and Membership and Chivalry Luncheon, as well as exclusive tours of notable destinations in historic Boston.

Confrères are invited to begin the Investiture Weekend with a tour of the USS Constitution Museum and Ship Friday morning to learn more about maritime culture, naval service and the American experience. Plan to stop by the Welcome Desk and Gift Shop at the Fairmont Copley Plaza, which will open Friday morning, to pick up your registration package— and perhaps a few Gift Shop items as well!

On Friday, attendees may continue to take in the sites around Boston by registering for the four tours being offered throughout the Weekend. Members of the U.S. Priory’s various societies will reconnect and receive updates during the afternoon teas. The U.S. Priory’s medical professionals and other invited guests will attend the fourth annual St John Ophthalmic Association Symposium (SOA), which will include medical presentations and updates on the St John Eye Hospital. The evening will conclude with a Welcome Reception at the beautiful Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, where attendees will enjoy lively conversation while marveling at the masterpieces throughout the Museum’s collection.

Saturday morning will begin with the Weekend’s premiere event—the Service of Investiture and Rededication, which will take place just steps from the Fairmont Copley Plaza at historic Trinity Church. Confrères will continue the sacred tradition of welcoming newly appointed Members, honoring promoted Members and rededicating themselves to the mission of the Order of St John. The Membership and Chivalry Luncheon will follow the Investiture Service, where Members will hear updates about the Hospital and the impact the U.S. Priory and its Members have on the patients it serves.

Investiture Weekend culminates with the annual Gala Benefit Dinner to benefit St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group. Join fellow Confrères during this elegant black-tie event that brings the 2021 Service of Investiture and Rededication Weekend to a close.

Although the Investiture Weekend is brief, the fellowship and camaraderie experienced throughout the Weekend lasts a lifetime. We hope you are able to join us for this remarkable event and look forward to seeing you in Boston!
ST JOHN AMBULANCE SUPPORTS UK’S NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (NHS)

Article by David Venn and Hannah Wynne, St John Ambulance, UK

When COVID-19 hit back in March last year, we knew we had to step up to support both St John Ambulance and the NHS. We have covered 68 NHS Support Shifts so far out of the Stevenage Hub, supporting both the East of England and London Ambulance services and the local community in need.

It has been an incredible journey and such a different experience to the majority of St John duties we have been used to covering. During the shifts we have covered we have had the pleasure of meeting wonderful patients who have been truly thankful for all that we do and are in awe that we volunteer our services.

The opportunity has provided us with invaluable experience, the chance to develop new skills and enhance existing ones and our confidence has grown immensely. We have had the opportunity to work closely with our ambulance partners, the teamwork has shone through and we have been welcomed into the NHS teams.

The shifts have given us many rewarding times, however times have been extremely tough given the pressures on the NHS services. More recently we attended two particularly tragic incidents, including a fatal road traffic collision and a nine-month-old baby in respiratory arrest who sadly passed away.

These events have had a huge effect on us and have tested our resilience, but we lifted ourselves up and continued to remember the reason why we do what we do.

For both incidents, we were the first resource on scene and had to put our emotions to one side to provide the best possible care that we could. These events have had a huge effect on us and have tested our resilience, but we lifted ourselves up and continued to remember the reason why we do what we do.

We continue to step up alongside many, many other St John personnel to continue this very rewarding and necessary work during this global pandemic. We would like to offer a huge thank you to all the people that have made this essential support work possible. Well done to all of you and to the organization for all its efforts during this tough period. It is a privilege to be part of such a great St John family!
ST JOHN’S DAY AROUND THE WORLD

The past 15 months have brought many changes to the lives of people around the world. But they have also forced change in the life of the Order of St John. In June 2020, the St Louis Region gave us an opportunity to come together virtually to reflect on our mission and commemorate the Nativity of St John the Baptist, the patron of our Order.

[USA - St Louis]

As the United States and other countries ease pandemic restrictions, many returned to more traditional celebrations on St John’s Day, June 24, 2021. The U.S. Priory’s Gulf Coast, Southwest, Charleston and San Francisco regions all held events in person or virtually commemorating the day, while Priories, Commanderies, and Associations around the world shared times of spiritual renewal and rededication. In the city of Invercargill, New Zealand, the First Presbyterian Church hosted a service that involved St John cadets, saw the induction of a new chaplain and the dedication of a new vehicle.

[NZ - Invercargill]

Across the Tasman Sea, the Priory in Australia hosted a number of services in honor of St John’s Day. In Melbourne, the Dean of St Paul’s Cathedral, Andreas Loewe, OStJ, helped to thank members of the Order of St John’s establishments for their work and to pray for them as they continued in service across Victoria. During the service, he blessed a new Standard of the Order saying, in part, “We praise God for the faithfulness of his servant John the Baptist who walked ahead to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. By your blessing may this standard be a symbol of unity and friendship to us who assemble in the name it bears. May we live our lives in the service of mercy, truth and justice, may we know your love in our hearts and find grace and strength to work for faith and humanity.” Inspiring words for those working for the Order around the world!

[AUS - Melbourne]

On the other side of the country, the Commandery of Western Australia held a similar service at St George’s Cathedral in Perth where the congregation prayed for the St John Eye of Jerusalem Eye Hospital, trainers for the St John Ambulance as well as St John First-Aiders, paramedics and ambulance crews.

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In some places, such as the Priory of Singapore, restrictions still made it difficult to come together in face-to-face meetings. The Chief Commissioner of St John Ambulance Brigade there, Dr. Nelson Chua, recorded an inspiring video address for members noting that despite pandemic-related limitations, the Order of St John had continued to build instructional and operational capabilities and serve humanity. It was a fitting recognition of the work that Order had done across the Priory.

In London, the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem lit St John’s Gate at Clerkenwell green in recognition of the day. The Priory of England and the Islands held a service of rededication at The Priory Church, and it was also the first day the Museum of the Order of St John has been open to the public in 15 months.

In many Priories, St John’s Day is not only a day of spiritual reflection, but a time of administrative change. As new terms of office begin on June 24, Priories see new leadership take on important roles. In the Priory of Scotland, Major-General Mark Strudwick, CBE, KStJ, handed over leadership to Eleanor Campbell, Duchess of Argyll, DStJ. The first woman to guide that Priory, she expressed her excitement in continuing the good work that her predecessor had done for the last six years.

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In Dublin, the St John Association of Ireland held a moving service commemorating St John’s Day. Though not a Priory or Commandery, the members of the Order there gathered at St Patrick’s Cathedral on St John’s Eve for what is an annual ecumenical service of rededication. Irish members of the Order were joined by the Chancellor of the Irish Association of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta and the Lieutenant of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre. The number of attendees was reduced due to pandemic restrictions, but the service was uplifting and meaningful to those attending. It highlighted the work of the Order across Ireland and the cooperation with other groups and organizations.

And finally, just across the Niagara River from the United States, the Priory of Canada commemorated not just St John’s Day, but the celebration of its 75th anniversary of being upgraded from a Commandery to a Priory in 1946. In front of the majestic Niagara Falls, Adam Carter, CStJ, highlighted the work that members of the Order do in Canada, and the fact that all the Order’s members around the world are committed to its humanitarian mission. As we consider the bigger picture of what our Order does across the globe, it is humbling to see just how much people are doing for the faith and in the service of humanity.
**PRO FIDE**

“You have heard that it is said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be the children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?”

Matthew 5:43:46

Most of you have probably heard that beloved old Irish Prayer that goes like this:

“Dear Lord, turn the hearts of my enemies and make them my friends. And if you cannot turn their hearts, then turn their ankles, that I may know them by their limping!”

In the time in which you and I live, there is a seemingly invisible undertow in the sea of life to buy into a culturally crafted, and much secular, mantra that only “some” people are truly lovable. There are those who may be “kind of” lovable, those who are obviously lovable and some who, well for whatever reason (political perspective, color of skin, ethnicity, religion … you name it) are just downright unlovable. Open your paper, read the news, listen to the talking heads (on the right and the left for the record) and our world really is in the business of deciding who is right and who is wrong, who is in and who is out, who is friend and who is enemy.

Well, what might our Lord say to our times? And in particular to our beloved Priory called upon to serve, aka love, all humanity? In this small lesson from Matthew’s Gospel, we have our answer.

Jesus’ antibiotic to the virus of division is love; and not just love of the lovable. He teaches his followers that love of your enemy is actually one of the pieces of the quilt that defines what it means to be a “child of God,” “love your enemies,” He says, “… that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”

Wow. You mean if I don’t “love my enemies,” my standing as a child of God may, in fact, in some way, be in jeopardy? Evidently, perhaps, yes. A few points here.

First, notice that Jesus’ command is a verb—an action verb that is—basically positive. It does not consist in ‘not’ doing doings, but in doing them.

In many world religions, there are similar rules, but it is usually stated in the negative. For example, Hillel, one of the great Jewish Rabbis, around 20 B.C., was once asked by a man to teach him the whole law while he stood on one leg. He responded, “What is hateful to thee, do not to another. That is the whole law and all else is commentary.”

Philo, the great Jew of Alexandria, said, “What you hate to suffer, do not do to anyone else.” The Stoics had as one of their basic rules, “What you do not wish to be done to yourself, do not you do to any other.” And when Confucius was asked, “Is there one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all of one’s life?” He answered, “Is not Reciprocity such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.”

But do you notice here? Every one of these ethical rules is negative. They tell us what we should “not” do. It is not very difficult to keep yourself from such action; but it is a very different thing to go out of your way to do to others what you would want them to do to you. Thus, the very essence of Christian living is that it consists not necessarily in refraining from bad things, but in actively doing good things. There can be few more powerful expressions of love than to love not just those who are lovable; but to love those who are not — those who are even our enemies.

A second kernel worth lifting up, then, is that this passage seems to suggest the Christian ethic requires something extra. Jesus dismisses the generally agreed upon ways of conduct by saying, “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?” In other words, if you love those who love you, big deal. Who doesn’t? If you do good to those who do good to you, so what? Even sinners do that. Jesus says you are to love everyone, even your enemies.

What is the power behind that kind of life? The third and final kernel to consider is that when we act this way, it makes us like God, for that is the way He acts. Jesus says that God “… makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous…” What that means, of course, is that God is kind to the man who brings Him joy and to the man who grieves His heart. God embraces the saint and sinner alike. Why does He do this? Because God is love—and that is the crux of all of Christianity.

The “Golden Rule” that we so often quote is the Rule of Love, and the Rule of Love is one of action—it requires that we ‘do unto,’ not simply be. The Christian ethic required by Jesus is an active, self-giving, self-sacrificing love. A selfish person usually finds it pretty hard to love, because they can never get around their own personal needs to reach out—but they would find it even harder to follow Jesus’ imperative today—love your enemy, because, again, that self-centered bent cannot ignore personal hatred, or anger, or pain.

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Frederick Buechner suggests there are three stages of love. The first stage is to believe that there is only one kind of love. The middle stage is to believe there are many kinds of love. The Greeks had a different word for each of them. That last stage is to believe there is only one kind of authentic love. For instance, we call that emotion of lovers, eros; the sympathetic companionship of friends we call philia and we call “God love,” agape.

But if we are serious about all three—erotic love, philia or ‘brotherly’ love and God love, we know that all are manifestations of a single reality. To lose yourself in another’s arms, or in another’s company or in suffering of all who suffer—including, even, the ones who inflict suffering upon you—to lose yourself in such ways, is to find yourself. That is what it is all about. That is what love is.¹

Our motto, too, is not negative. “Pro,” of course means “For.” “Pro Fide,” calls on us to promote the faith entrusted to us; and “Pro Utilitate Hominum,” calls on us to do so to benefit our fellow humans. Jesus might say, “You have heard about the faith—now do something about it! You know your fellow humans—now do something for them!” How? Love them—not just with your lips, but with your lives! Indeed …

Pro Fide,
The Rev. Dr. Russell J. Levenson, Jr., OStJ
Sub-Prelate


AN EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK TREASURES. BUY YOUR COPY HERE.

With an oak core covered by thin plates of silver held in place with tiny silver tacks, this cross was used by the Order in England to lead ceremonial processions until the 1980s. When the original became too fragile, an exact replica was made. Nothing is known of the cross in the intervening years between its creation in France in the sixteenth century and its presentation to the Order almost 400 years later. It is perhaps, like a number of other Museum treasures, an object that was removed from the Catholic Order through underhanded means following the French Revolution in 1789, when the Order’s properties were requisitioned by the State. The cross was purchased in Paris by Sir Edmund Lechmere, who had so generously bought St John’s Gate for the fledgling Order in 1873. It was bequeathed in 1904 by Katherine, Lady Lechmere, a member of the Order in her own right who with her husband had done much to advance the Order’s charitable mission.

The fact that the cross is elaborately decorated on all sides indicates that it was designed to be processed and viewed from all angles, not just from the front. The planes of the cross are covered with silver panels that have been hammered into relief from the reverse side—an example of Renaissance repousse workmanship that is repeated on each facet. The arms of the cross terminate in the form of a fleur-de-lys and at the end of each there is a quatrefoil depicting the respective emblems of the four Evangelists.

This photograph of the St John’s Day procession outside St John’s Gate in the mid-1920s is a reminder that, as a Christian charity, faith is an integral part of the Order’s humanitarian mission.