



## History of the Order of St John

The Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem originated in a hospice founded around 1070 to care for pilgrims, which was dedicated to St John the Baptist. The brothers and sisters of the Hospital, which was recognized as a religious Order by the Pope in 1113, nursed the poor and sick of any faith.

The brothers also took on the role of defending Christians. When Jerusalem was lost in 1187, they established their headquarters in Acre on the coast of Palestine, before moving to Cyprus and then in 1309 to Rhodes. In 1530 they were given Malta, which they governed until they were expelled by Napoleon in 1798.

The Order's lands throughout Western Europe were managed by communities of its members called Commanderies, which were gathered into provinces called Grand Priories. In Britain the estates were administered from a Commandery at Clerkenwell, London, from about 1140. This became a Priory in 1185, with responsibility for other Commanderies that had been set up in Scotland and Wales as well as throughout England. Ireland became a separate Priory.

In 1540 the Order was suppressed with other monastic and religious institutions by King Henry VIII. It was restored and incorporated by Queen Mary I in 1557, but Queen Elizabeth I again confiscated all its estates in 1559. The influence of the Reformation ended the Order's activities in Scotland in about 1564.

The Roman Catholic Order of the Hospital of St John, which is now known as The Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta (or simply the Order of Malta) survived its expulsion from Malta. In the 1820s its Knights living in France offered knighthoods to supporters in Great Britain, irrespective of their Christian denomination. This initiative was not ratified by the Order of Malta, but the English Knights devoted themselves to charitable activities.

They were recognised by Queen Victoria and their Order became an Order of the British Crown in 1888. They had founded an eye hospital in Jerusalem in 1882. They had already set up St John Ambulance to train people in first aid in 1877 and in 1887 their volunteers were organised into a uniformed Brigade to serve at public events. The Ambulance Association and the Brigade were amalgamated in 1974. In many parts of Britain, St John was the first and only provider of an ambulance service up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Order of St John, also known as St John International, is active in 30 countries around the world.



## History of the Priory in the United States of America

- 1957** The American Society of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem is formed and incorporated as a non-profit charitable organization exempt from federal taxation under Internal Revenue Code paragraph 501(c)(3).
- 1996** The Priory in the USA is constituted as the Most Venerable Order's seventh Priory by the Grand Prior. Representatives from the other six Priories convene in Washington, DC, for a service at Washington National Cathedral. The American Society of the Order of St John continues, parallel to the Priory, as the domestic legal and statutory corporate charitable entity. The first Prior of the Priory in the USA is John R. Drexel IV, GCStJ, and its headquarters are in New York City.
- 2001** The third Annual Grand Council Meeting convenes in Washington, DC, hosted by the Priory in the USA.
- 2008** In April, the Board of Governors of the American Society votes to move the Priory's offices to Washington, DC. The tenth Annual Grand Council Meeting convenes in June in Alexandria, VA, hosted by the Priory in the USA. The Priory in the USA moves to Washington, DC, in September and in October welcomes Ruth Ann Skaff as its new Executive Director. At the 48th Annual Service of Rededication, held on November 8<sup>th</sup> at the National Cathedral, A. Marshall Acuff Jr., GCStJ, is officially installed as the Prior of the Priory in the USA, succeeding John R. Drexel IV. In 2010 he is appointed and invested as a Bailiff Grand Cross of the Order.
- 2012** In June the membership approves the merger of the Priory and the American Society into one entity—The Priory in the USA. With the merger, the Board of Governors becomes Priory Chapter.
- 2014** On November 1st at Grace Episcopal Cathedral, San Francisco, Palmer Clarkson Hamilton, KStJ, is officially installed as the third Prior of the Priory in the USA, succeeding A. Marshall Acuff Jr.
- 2018** The twentieth Annual Grand Council Meeting convenes in Williamsburg, Virginia, hosted by the Priory in the USA.

For more information on the Order of St John and the Priory in the USA, please visit  
[www.saintjohn.org](http://www.saintjohn.org).