



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 1

JANUARY 2021

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRIOR

Dear Fellow Confrères,

I wish you a happy and, above all, a healthy new year.

I don't know about you, but there are times when I have felt rather overwhelmed by the volume of negative news on my TV screen, in my

email or personal phone calls. How then, you might ask, can I sincerely wish you a *happy* new year? The answer is in no small way because of all the positive news I hear from, and about, my fellow Confrères in the Order.

***...we are an organization focused on what we can do for others, and the spread of hope and good news.***

Every article in this newsletter in one way or another reminds us that we are an organization focused on what we can do for others, and the spread of hope and good news. One of the mysteries of generosity is the great joy it brings not only to the recipient, but also to the giver.

Following our virtual service of dedication, I was delighted to hear from a Confrère who was moved to offer great generosity. Marshall Acuff, GCStJ, former Prior and longstanding Member and advocate of our Priory, put forward a remarkable offer of a \$100,000 end-of-year matching grant.

This was totally unexpected, and I was quite taken aback. Knowing that so many of you had already been so generous with the recent Investiture Appeal, I wondered if we would be able to meet this challenge. However, I did not have to wonder for long. Almost instantly the benevolence of Marshall inspired others to respond with similar selflessness. The challenge put forward by Marshall was not only met, but was exceeded by the year-end deadline. This allowed our Priory to increase our final quarter donation to the Hospital to \$600,000. I extend my great thanks to Marshall and all of you who joined with

him. Similarly, gratitude is extended to all of our U.S. Priory Confrères from the St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group in the letter found later in this newsletter. Sir Andrew Cash, Chairman of the Board, and Ahmad Ma'ali, Chief Executive Officer, share how the U.S. Priory has been of particular importance in the continued operation of the Hospital during these especially difficult times.

Our actions as Confrères frequently serve as a catalyst to encourage others. Many great examples of this are found in our St John Volunteer Corps (SJVC). Established in 2013, the Corps has grown steadily both in participating Confrères and its activities. Many Confrères found it difficult to locate opportunities in their area, or that fit into their work schedules or align with their skills or interests. From the start, one of my goals as Prior has been to eliminate these obstacles. The SJVC National Committee was formed to find ways to achieve this goal. Over the past six months its members have worked diligently to prepare a new SJVC Strategic Plan and Volunteer Handbook. These documents are the next step in expanding our Volunteer Corps and our opportunities to serve our Lords the sick and the poor, while fulfilling our obligation of generosity in time and talent to our Order. Please watch for more information and the availability of these documents in forthcoming communications. I extend my gratitude to the SJVC National Committee, under the leadership of Richard Southby, Vice Chancellor, SJVC, and Butler Derrick, SJVC National Committee Co-Chair, for their ongoing dedication and conscientious work.

While COVID-19 and political divisiveness may continue to dominate our headlines, let us never forget that we are blessed to be part of an Order that generates so much good in so many ways around the world. In the year ahead I encourage you all to focus on the good within our Order and the wider world, and refuse to let it be hidden in the darkness.

*Pro Fide,*  
Nigel G. Heath, KStJ  
Prior

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## MEET THE DOCTOR:

### DR. OMAR ABED AL DAYEM / VITREORETINAL SPECIALIST

Dr. Omar is a vitreoretinal specialist at St John Eye Hospital Group. He received his medical degree from Baluchistan University Bolan Medical College in Pakistan in 2002.

Dr. Omar worked as a volunteer at the St John Eye Hospital for two months immediately after the internship year. He dreamed of becoming an ophthalmologist, but could not enroll in the Hospital's residency program because there were no vacancies. He waited three years for his opportunity.

During the three years, he volunteered for one year at the emergency department at Makassed Hospital. Afterwards, he worked in the gynecology department in Makassed Hospital for another year. Dr. Omar said, "One phone call changed my life." He received a phone call from the hospital in 2006 and was told there was a vacancy for an ophthalmic resident.

Dr. Omar said, "My dream has come true. St John was the changing point in my career." He completed his residency in ophthalmology in 2010 and passed the Palestinian board exam the same year. Dr. Omar worked in the Hospital after completing the residency program as a junior fellow. In 2011, the Hospital arranged for him to start a one-year fellowship in vitreoretinal surgery at Aditya Eye Hospital in India. Dr. Omar also attended the American Academy of Ophthalmology in 2018.

***His subspecialty is very important because the number of patients with retinal diseases has increased dramatically due to the increased prevalence of diabetes over the last decade.***

Through the Hospital, Dr. Omar provides diagnosis and treatment for patients with vitreoretinal problems. He has helped thousands of patients with retinal problems restore their vision and lead normal lives. His subspecialty is very important because the number of patients with retinal diseases has increased dramatically due to the increased prevalence of diabetes over the last decade.

*Editor's Comments: We are pleased to periodically profile the outstanding doctors who work at the Hospital. Individual Confrères or Regional Committees collectively are welcome to sponsor these staff members. For more information, please contact Michele Blair, Executive Director, at [mblair@saintjohn.org](mailto:mblair@saintjohn.org). \**



## FATMEH'S STORY

One day Fatmeh woke up and saw a “black blanket” over her left eye.

She was a nursery school teacher in Gaza, but eventually quit her job as her eyesight progressively worsened. She was unable to read or write properly, and suffered from frequent, severe headaches.

Her mother, who previously depended on Fatmeh due to her own poor eyesight, had to change roles with her daughter and help her instead. Unemployed and with very little vision, Fatmeh could no longer support her family.

She went to the government hospital in Gaza, but doctors there were unable to help her. She was referred to the ophthalmic doctors in St John's highly reputable satellite clinic in Gaza. At the St John clinic, she was diagnosed with a detached retina, and was quickly referred to our main Hospital in Jerusalem.

At St John Eye Hospital, doctors performed vitrectomy surgery to repair Fatmeh's detached retina. Thanks to the continued commitment of Members of the U.S. Priory to serve our Lords the sick and the poor through support of St John Eye Hospital Group, Fatmeh's vision was much improved, allowing her to go back to teaching, taking care of her mother and family and being a productive member of her community. ✨





## PLEASE SAVE THE DATE

**2021 Service of Investiture and Rededication Weekend**

**September 10-12, 2021**

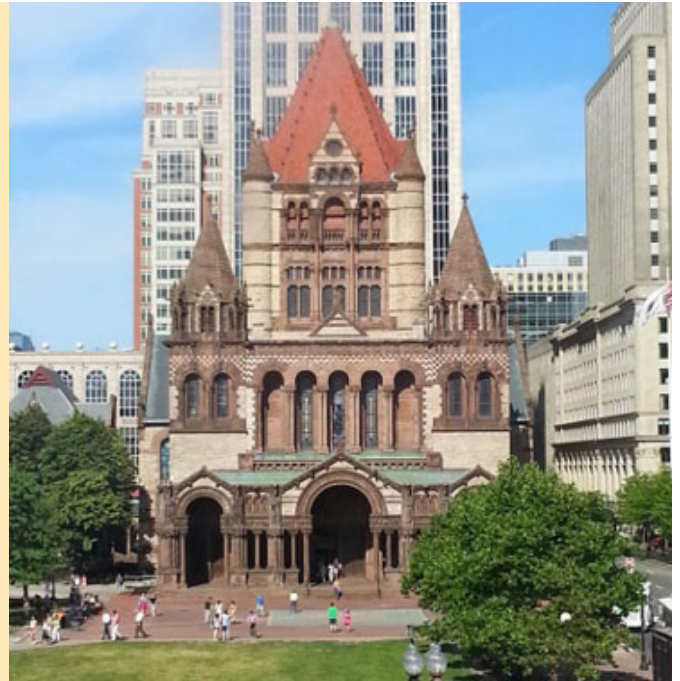
**Boston, Massachusetts**

Mark your calendars now!

All meetings will be held Friday afternoon, September 10th, and the Investiture Service will take place Saturday morning, September 11th.

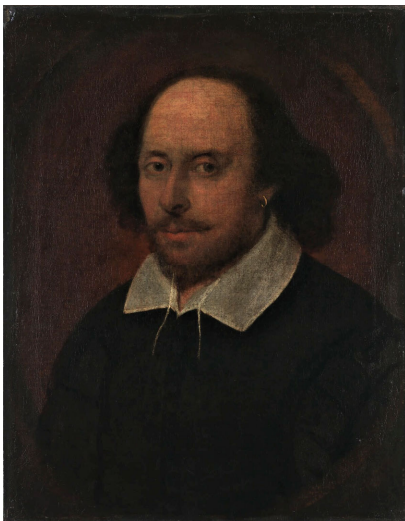
Additional information about hotel accommodations and event schedules will be distributed soon.

We look forward to seeing you. ✨



## TREASURES

While only St John's Gate and the Priory Church remain above ground today, Wenceslaus Hollar's 17th century engraving shows the extent of the original Priory buildings, which by the time of the dissolution in 1540 were said to resemble a palace.



The Priory buildings in Clerkenwell have been put to a variety of uses. As the Office of Tents and Revels from 1578 to 1607, the Priory would have been a hive of activity—with set design, costume making and rehearsals all taking place, including for the 30 plays by William Shakespeare that the Master of Revels licensed while occupying St John's Gate.

That bit of history and much more are included in *Treasures*, available for purchase [here](#). ✨

# GAZA'S CHILDREN:

## YOUR SUPPORT SAVES SIGHT AND OFFERS HOPE

Children are often the forgotten casualties of societies living under harsh conditions and economic duress. This is no more true than it is in the Gaza Strip, where an estimated 36% of the population is under the age of 14 (twice the percentage of the US), where the infant mortality rates are double to treble that of Western nations\*, and life expectancy is about 65, 15 years less than the US and the UK.

Coupled to poverty and restricted movement in the Gaza strip are the dual hardships of consanguinity and injury, both prevalent in this population, and both causes of eye disorders and blindness.

St John's new flagship clinic in Gaza City was opened in 2016. Since then it has seen over 150,000 thousand patients, of whom 40,000 are children under the age of 18. In 2019, the year before lockdown, the Hospital saw a total of 33,413 patients (of which 6,817 were children), and undertook 335 paediatric operations.



*Dr. David Verity with a young patient who was being fitted for a prosthetic eye*

Thus, St John in Gaza provides a vital service to these children, and your support cannot be overestimated. Injuries and infections of the eye require urgent treatment if the sight of the child is to be saved. Congenital and hereditary disease, such as droopy eyelid ('ptosis'), congenital glaucoma, squint, and cataracts must be corrected early in life during the critical 'window' for visual development. If these disorders are not treated early, the child will develop 'amblyopia', or a 'lazy eye', in which the cerebral visual cortex fails to develop in the absence of a normal visual stimulus. Although these

disorders can also occur later in life, the visual cortex in adults has already 'learned' to see, and there is no risk of amblyopia. Sadly, even today many adults are affected by amblyopia for want of screening and specialist treatment earlier in their younger years, and this disability stays with them for life, reducing their chances and opportunities even further.

In addition to St John's work with children in Gaza City, the Group also runs outreach clinics the length and breadth of



*Dr. David Verity at the outpatient clinic in the Hospital in Gaza City*

the Gaza Strip to screen for amblyopia, arranging urgent treatment at the main hospital in Gaza, or, if necessary, specialist treatment in Jerusalem. In the West, preschool visual screening at the age of four years identifies these patients early, but in Gaza no such universal health service exists. Thus, your support for St John in Gaza literally gives these children sight and hope for a better future.

In finishing, we acknowledge the dedication and skill of St John's nurses, doctors, anaesthetists, and clerical staff, whose commitment to their patients is truly an inspiration. Their work is only possible due to the tireless support from our Members across the world, and particularly those in the Priory of St John in the US. Your commitment gives them the tools and encouragement to work in a community very different to ours, and your practical and financial support reaches children throughout Gaza. In doing so, you give them sight, and their families hope for a better future. Thank you.

*Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum,*  
David H Verity, M.D., MA, FRCOphth  
Hospitaller, Order of St John

## REFERENCES

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_the\\_Palestinian\\_territories](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_the_Palestinian_territories)
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_the_United_States)
- <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/infantmortality.htm>

\* The infant mortality rate is defined as the number of infant deaths before the age of one year for every 1,000 live births. In the Gaza strip the IMR is 13.6 deaths/1,000 population (2018 est.), being double that of the US (average 6.5), and treble that of the UK (4.3).



# A "THANK YOU" FROM THE ST JOHN EYE HOSPITAL GROUP FOR THE US PRIORY'S CONTINUED SUPPORT OF THE HOSPITAL.



**St John of Jerusalem  
Eye Hospital Group**

**Patron:**

The Lord Vestey KCVO, DL

**Chairman:**

Sir Andrew Cash OBE

**Hospitaller:**

Mr David Verity OSTJ

Friday, 8 January 2021

**Mr. Nigel Heath**

**Prior of The St. John Priory in the USA**

Dear Nigel

We are writing to formally thank you and all our colleagues and supporters at the St. John US Priory for your ongoing support to the St. John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group. In 2020 and despite the global pandemic, the US Priory continued and even maximized its efforts to ensure that the Hospital group continues its mission of combating blindness in the Holy Land. This ongoing and highly appreciated financial and moral support that the Hospital enjoyed during 2020 has enabled us to sustain our services and meet the eye care needs of the most marginalized in the Holy land.

Thanks to the support received from US Priory we treated 102,000 patients at the Group and performed more than 5700 major eye surgeries. Our charitable work was even strengthened for the Gaza patients as well as Jerusalemites living outside the Jerusalem boundaries. We have maintained the quality of our work and have embarked on a number of research and innovative projects. In 2020, we also have strengthened our local and international partnerships.

Our staff are our most precious asset and therefore, we have continued to support them and respond to their educational and developmental needs. During the year, two of our doctors commenced their fellowship training at two Israeli Hospitals and one of our nurses commenced her ocularist training in Turkey.

From the start of the pandemic, we ensured that all the necessary personal protective equipment is available, and measures and protocols are in place and fully implemented to reduce the risk to our staff and patients. This has enabled us to assure patients and staff that our Hospital Group is safe, and this encouraged patients to seek care at the Hospital despite the spread of COVID 19 in the country.

With the arrival of the COVID 19 vaccine, we liaised with the Israeli Ministry of Health and our Jerusalem staff were amongst the first in the country to receive the first dose of the vaccine. As for staff working in Gaza and the West Bank, they will also be vaccinated in the next few weeks when the vaccine becomes available for the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

The dedication of our staff and the support of our worldwide St. John family, in particular the St. John US Priory, were pivotal in overcoming all the challenges during this global pandemic.

On behalf of our patients and staff as well as Board Trustees, we thank you for your support and send our heartfelt gratitude to all our supporters at the US Priory.

*Andrew Cash. Ahmad Ma'ali*

Best regards,

Sir Andrew Cash, Chairman of the Board  
Dr. Ahmad Ma'ali, Chief Executive Officer

**ST JOHN OF JERUSALEM  
EYE HOSPITAL GROUP**  
Saving Sight, Changing Lives

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# PROMOTIONS AND APPOINTMENTS

With the holiday season behind us, it is time to turn our attention to the important issue of nominations and promotions. The **March 1st deadline** will be here before we know it!

Each year the Priory Honors and Awards Committee (PHAC) selects nominees for appointment and promotion from those who meet the Order's standards, within our Priory allocation. PHAC's recommendations are forwarded to the Order Honors and Awards Committee (OHAC) in London, which sends its recommendations to Her Majesty The Queen, who makes the ultimate decision.

The Order has established regulations and guidelines for each Grade, which PHAC has adopted:

Grade	Talent	Time in Grade (not less than, years)
V (Member) "Notable"	Notable and committed service to others that reflect the values of the Order	
IV (Officer) "Distinguished"	In addition: Making a distinguished contribution to the Order and, or by serving in a Regional role.	3
III (Commander) "Exceptional"	In addition: Making an exceptional contribution to the Order and, or by serving in a significant Regional, National or International role.	5
II (Dame and Knight) "Outstanding"	In addition: Making an outstanding contribution to the Order by serving as Regional Chair, in a National or International leadership role and, or fulfilling other major Priory responsibilities.	10

Selfless service is the foundation upon which our Order is built; as Members of the Order we have promised to serve both others and the Order itself. But how much are we each to give? Everyone's circumstances and opportunities differ. These differences are important to the vitality of our Priory. Confrères are to contribute meaningful gifts; that is donations of **time**, **talent** and **treasure** that reflect the importance of the Order in their lives.

When considering nominees for appointment and promotion PHAC is mindful that the opportunities for participation in each arena will differ over time for each and every Confrère. There is, however, a general expectation of increasing progression of generosity in the giving of time, talent and treasure if a Confrère is to advance in responsibility and Grade within the Order.

As Confrères we are required to give an annual Oblation; this is not a payment for membership. It is an offering to God that affirms our willingness to serve our Lords the Sick and the Poor. What we give, whether in time, talent or treasure, over and above that required minimum is how we undertake the greater commitment to serve others.

In the last several years OHAC has asked Pories to support recommendations for promotion to Grade II with additional information in a specific format. This year OHAC requires this for all candidates for both membership and promotion. The nomination form for prospective Members may be found [here](#). For promotions, each U.S. Regional Chair has been provided the lists of Members in their regions who are eligible for promotion. Once the decision is made to recommend promotion of any of those eligible Members, it is important to present a thorough profile of the endeavors of each candidate using the required form, which may be found [here](#).

If you would like more information about the U.S. Priory's appointment and nomination process, the attached [video](#) of a Sponsor Workshop hosted for Regional Chairs last month is very helpful and a good resource.

Nominating qualified candidates for appointment and promotion is one of the most important contributions we can make to the Priory and the Order. The process is not difficult, but it does require time and attention to ensure you nomination is complete and, most importantly, **submitted by the March 1st deadline!** 🌟





## PRO FIDE

*"I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word..."<sup>1</sup>*

I don't know about you, but every now and then when I was a kid, and I had gotten out of line, my father, or grandmother or teacher or coach would say something like, *"I want you to go sit down and think about what you did,"* (or did not do, or said, etc.—you get the picture!). The hope, of course was that in that little moment, I would "come to my senses," and see the error of my ways and then set a course to put things right. And you know what—most of the time, it worked!

We have heard this a lot lately... *"this is a time like no other."* We have had an Easter like no other, a summer like no other, a football season like no other, a start to school like no other, a Thanksgiving, and a Christmas and a New Year like "no other." Soon, Christians around the world will usher in a "Lent like no other." Many will begin that Holy Season with an Ash Wednesday liturgy. Included in the opening words of that service is the invitation I have shared above—but note the first plea to those entering the Lenten season... *"I invite you to a holy Lent, by **self-examination**..."*

It seems to me, one of the opportunities before us during a "Lent like no other," is to spend some time examining whether or not we spend too much time "thinking" about ourselves. In a time of scarcity, as 2020 was, it is often human nature to become a bit stingy. What was the first thing many did during the opening weeks of Covid—hoard!

As members of the Order, the chief way we incarnate our faith (Pro Fide) is to serve our fellow humans, (Pro Utilitate Hominum). We cannot "do" that second part, if our gaze is always in the mirror. Toward that end, a holy Lent invites us to the spiritual discipline of humility.

The late Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple (d. 1944) once preached, "Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself than of other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself one way or the other at all."

What might that look like? Norman Cousins spent a great deal of time with Albert Schweitzer at his hospital at Lambarene in French Equatorial Africa. In reflection on those days, he wrote;

*"The biggest impression I had in leaving Lambarene was of the enormous reach of a single human being. Yet such a life was not without punishment of fatigue. Albert Schweitzer was supposed to be severe in his demands on the people who worked with him. Yet any demands he made on others were as nothing compared to the demands he made on himself... History is willing to overlook almost anything—errors, paradoxes, personal weaknesses or faults—if only a man will give enough of himself to others."<sup>2</sup>*

What might that come down to for you this Lenten season? For that, I will share some words I captured from a sermon by the late Bruce Thielemann, (d. 1994) who for many years served as pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh. He was once prodded by an active layman, *"You preachers talk a lot about giving, but when you get right down to it, it all comes down to basin theology."* Thielemann asked, *"Basin theology? What's that?"*

The layman replied, *"Remember what Pilate did when he had the chance to acquit Jesus? He called for a basin and washed his hands of the whole thing. But Jesus, the night before his death, called for a basin and proceeded to wash the feet of the disciples. It all comes down to basin theology: Which one will you use?"<sup>3</sup>*

So my fellow Confreres...Lent is upon us...indeed, let us examine—examine how we promote our faith, by serving the world around us.

*Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum*  
RJL+, MStJ

<sup>1</sup> From The Ash Wednesday Liturgy, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 265.

<sup>2</sup> From *Albert Schweitzer's Mission*, by Norman Cousins (W. W. Norton & Company, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Larson, Craig Brian: 750 Engaging Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers & Writers. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Books, 2002, S. 503)