FOR THE FAITH AND
IN THE SERVICE OF HUMANITY

Eyes on the Future

THE ORDER OF ST JOHN
PRIORY IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
VOLUME 1, NUMBER 2
SEPTEMBER 2020

Honoring the Blessed Gerard

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PRIOR’S MESSAGE

Thank you to our dedicated Communications team for the successful launch of our new digital format newsletter last month. Inspired by the positive feedback from many Confrères, I am pleased to welcome you to our second edition.

I am delighted to announce that the Prior’s Appeal has raised over $200,000 in donations in lieu of this year’s Investiture and Rededication Weekend. I thank you all for your prompt support and your generosity. Our much-needed donations continue, and I am optimistic that we shall reach our goal of $300,000 – money so desperately needed by the Eye Hospital. If you have not yet had the opportunity to give or feel that you would like to give more, you may send a check to the Priory office, call the office at 202-510-9691 with your credit card information or make an online donation at www.saintjohn.org.

I also thank our many Confrères who are working diligently and quietly behind the scenes on our Strategic Planning, Regional Chair and Volunteer Corps Committees, creating our future strategy, exploring the expansion of the roles of our Regional Committees and ways to expand volunteer opportunities and create easier access to participation for all. Each of these Committees will be presenting reports to the Chapter during its October 16th meeting, as we all continue to enhance our service to our Lords the sick and the poor.

Please feel free, at any time, to send me your suggestions, comments or critiques at: Prior@saintjohn.org

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

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HOSPITALLER’S MESSAGE

As your new Hospitaller since St John’s Day, it is my distinct honor to take over this post from Dr. Anne Coleman, who is the current President of the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Vice Chairman of the UCLA Jules Stein Eye Institute. Although I am not an ophthalmologist, I have been deeply involved in eyecare for longer than 20 years as I served as the CEO of Allergan Inc., which prior to its sale was one of the leading global eyecare pharmaceutical and device companies. Furthermore, I have been and still am deeply involved in eyecare charities both in the U.S. as well as globally, serving on many Boards of Directors and in advisory roles. By pure chance, my brother is an ophthalmologist in Scotland and at the time worked at St John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem in the late 1980s alongside our Hospitaller of the Order, Dr. David Verity. Global ophthalmology is indeed a very small world of engaged individuals!

As your Hospitaller, it is my job to serve as the liaison to the Eye Hospital Group in London and in particular to the Eye Hospital in Jerusalem, and its satellite operations, especially in Gaza; and to encourage financial support from the U.S. Priory to the Eye Hospital. Given my extensive network of contacts in eyecare, a key priority for me will be to assist Dr. Verity to build up the St John Ophthalmic Association (SOA), which is composed of ophthalmologists, nurses and ophthalmic professionals. One of the goals of the SOA is to provide high quality online learning opportunities for ophthalmologists as well as creating medical research capabilities at St John. I hope that many more American ophthalmologists and nurses will wish, in the coming years, to join the Order and support our mission.

Now I will comment on the situation in Jerusalem and the Palestinian Authority areas. Given that some of our services to Palestinian patients are reimbursed by the Palestinian Authority (PA), we are always in a challenging situation even before the impact of COVID-19 on our operations. First, a report on the pandemic: lockdown restrictions were eased in May and in June almost all restrictions were removed. This led to an unfortunate surge in cases in July, and by mid-August there were 30,000 cases and more than 150 deaths in the PA areas. An epicenter developed in Hebron, but thankfully Gaza has been spared. In the larger area, and in context, Israel has reached 117,000 cases with more than 900 deaths. In the hospital, a guard, a cleaner and two nurses tested positive for COVID-19 but made excellent recoveries and resumed their work. There have been no cases of cross infection. We have been fortunate to receive funds from the European Union and the World Health Organization to purchase personal protective equipment.

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September 3, 2020, marked the 900th anniversary of the death of the Blessed Gerard, founder of the Order of St John.

Gerard served as a lay brother in the Benedictine order. He and a number of Benedictine brothers from Amalfi, Italy, travelled to Jerusalem, and in 1080 Gerard was appointed rector of the Hospital of St John in Jerusalem, which had been built on the site of the Monastery of St John the Baptist near the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The purpose of the hospital was to care for Jerusalem's many frail and exhausted pilgrims, regardless of race or faith. The brothers served Christian, Muslim, and Jew alike.

After the success of the First Crusade (1096-1099), and the establishment of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, the hospital grew under Gerard's direction in wealth and stature, and in 1113 was declared an independent religious order by Pope Paschal II. While the hospital existed long before his arrival in Jerusalem, Gerard is cited in the papal bull as being the founder of the Order. The serving brothers became Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem, with Gerard serving as their first grandmaster. Over time, the Hospitallers began to not just care for injured or sick pilgrims, but to protect them during their travels. They became a military religious order, officially establishing their own militia in 1118. The Templar Order wasn’t established until 1119.

Gerard died in 1120, just 7 years after the Order of St John was founded. His remains were kept in the monastery in Jerusalem. When the city fell to the Muslim army, his remains were moved to the Hospitaller stronghold in Acre, Israel.

His bones eventually made their way to Provence, France. Most were lost or destroyed during the French Revolution of 1789-1799. However, Gerard’s skull had been transferred to St Ursula’s Convent in Malta, where it remains to this day.

Observing social distancing and other Covid precautions, an Order of Malta delegation attended a Eucharist service in Gerard’s honor in Scala, Italy, which claims the honor of being his birthplace. And in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Gerard was further honored as the statue of Christ the Redeemer was lit in red, with a white Maltese cross on his chest.

The Historia of Fulcher of Chartres, a priest and chronicler of the First Crusade, records Gerard’s epitaph as reading:

“The Sovereign Military Order of Malta, in Scala, Italy, practicing social distancing at a Eucharist service honoring the 900th anniversary of the Blessed Gerard’s death.

Nine hundred years later, his legacy lives on, as members of the Order worldwide continue to care for our lords the sick and the poor, for the faith, and in service to mankind.
INTRODUCING OUR NEW SUB-PRELATE, THE REV. RUSS LEVENSON, MSTJ

by Tim Blair, MSTJ
Communications Committee Member

Russ Levenson is a man with many missions.

As the rector of St. Martin’s Church in Houston—the largest Episcopal Church in North America—Russ shepherds a congregation of nearly 10,000 parishioners.

At the same time, he has recently assumed the spiritual mantle as Sub-Prelate to the U.S. Priory.

What’s that, you may ask?

“The way I see it, the Sub-Prelate works with our Prior, Nigel Heath, to build upon the service of my predecessors by continuing to promote the spiritual mission of the Priory,” Russ says. “I believe there’s an opportunity to be a pastor to our lay membership, and to serve as a source of spiritual direction, connecting the many clergy who are members of the Priory.”

“Born, really, as a mission in Palestine, we have always been about the business of doing God’s work,” he says. “As Members of the Order, it’s important to be thankful we’ve been given the gift of being part of something so ancient, and yet so relevant; as the call to promote the faith and serve our fellow humans continues to grow and spread around the globe.”

He earned a BA degree from Birmingham-Southern University in 1984, a Master of Divinity from Virginia Theological Seminary in 1992, and completed his Doctor of Ministry from Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in 1997. Russ was ordained to the priesthood in 1992, and has served parishes in Alabama, Tennessee, Virginia, Louisiana and Florida before coming to St. Martin’s where he just celebrated his 13th anniversary as rector.

A native of Birmingham, Alabama, Russ and Laura, his wife of 36 years, have three children and two grandchildren.

He has authored articles for numerous magazines and books, and in 2020 Church Publishing released three of his own titles, *Bits of Heaven*, *Finding Shelter*, *Preparing Room* and soon to be released *A Path to Wholeness*, a Lenten devotional.

In 2018, Levenson was twice invited to serve our nation, by officiating and preaching at the Memorial Service for First Lady, Barbara Pierce Bush; and then only months later serving as co-officiant and preacher for the state funeral of President George H.W. Bush at Washington’s National Cathedral and as the officiant and homilist at the final memorial service for the President at St. Martin’s, the Bush’s home parish for over 50 years.

Levenson has been a member of the Order since 2015 and is eagerly looking forward to his term of service as our new Sub-Prelate.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Russ will write a regular column for the Newsletter, focusing on our call to ministry as members of the Order.

LUMA’S STORY

At a weekly pediatric clinic, six-year-old Luma’s severe squint was diagnosed early enough to avoid surgery. Now happily wearing glasses, she has a chance to receive a proper education.

Her father says, “There is nowhere else in Palestine with St John’s level of training. Each clinic is run by a skilled specialty doctor. I would not trust anyone other than St John with my daughter’s eyes.”

Luma’s story is one of the highlighted case studies on the U.S. Priory’s website. 🔄
ORDER MEMBER Responds to Covid in San Quentin Prison

by Daniel P. Reany, MSJ
Communications Committee Chairman

As healthcare professionals worldwide fight to contain the Coronavirus, Ethan Bond, MSJ, battles the deadly disease with his team in California’s San Quentin and Lompoc prisons.

“When COVID-19 ravaged Lompoc Prison in April, I mobilized a medical team of 25 healthcare professionals, and within a week we had established an alternative care site inside the prison. The facility is still operating, having treated more than 500 patients, with a zero infection rate among our staff, and a 100% survival rate for our patients,” said Ethan, who works as a project manager for a Virginia-based security company that provides logistics and medical solutions to private companies and government agencies.

At the beginning of July, at the request of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Ethan opened a 250-bed facility with a team of 67 staff in San Quentin Prison. “The conditions within a prison, especially an older one like San Quentin, serve as a perfect petri dish for the transmission of an aerosol borne disease like COVID-19. As a result, San Quentin has experienced 2,157 cases, including 25 deaths, out of a population of 3,237.”

The facility Ethan established has received more than 100 patients to date, and will continue operations for the duration of the pandemic. “In the best tradition of the Order, these facilities provide critical care to an extremely vulnerable patient population, whose past misdemeanors are not a concern of ours, only their need,” Ethan said. “One of the most rewarding aspects has been treating those patients who were eligible for early release, non-violent offenders with less than 12 months left on their sentences.”

Ethan’s team received a letter from a former inmate, who spent the last two weeks of his sentence in their medical facility before being released early after he recovered.

“Just want to thank all of you for caring for me and all the other inmates. I spent more than 2 weeks under your care and was treated with respect, dignity, and love. Your compassion towards me and the rest of the world is greatly appreciated, even though some people don’t view it that way. You guys are really making a huge difference in the world and I just want to thank you for your service and all you’ve done. I’ve seen you guys working long hours. Being away from your loved ones and friends must be as hard as it is for us. Please be safe. I’ll pray for this crisis to be finally over so we can all move on with our lives. Thank you again, and God bless.”

“I only recently joined the Order,” Ethan said, “and did so because the key principles of the Order are those that I have held dear my entire life.”

His current prison work is not Ethan’s first encounter with human suffering or deadly disease. He helped establish and run Ebola treatment centers in West Africa, a medical facility in Somalia and a mobile eye surgery mission in Iraq similar to the Order’s efforts in Jerusalem. “It provides a unique and rewarding challenge to drop into chaos and create an oasis where people can be healed, and I think that level of reward can become very addictive, if somewhat exhausting.”

Working in San Quentin, Ethan often thinks of the history of the Most Venerable Order. “This is the oldest prison in California and they have kept the original fortified building intact. It was built by prisoners themselves in 1848. You enter through a 20-foot-high stone archway into a sally port with 10-foot-thick walls and iron gates that would not look out of place in a Hospitaller fortress. The palm trees and current heatwave only add to the effect.”

Next stop in Ethan’s lifesaving crusade, Folsom Prison. “We’re trying to get ahead of the curve there as we anticipate that will be the next hotspot.”
The pandemic has had a major impact on our operations. For the period January to July our number of outpatients decreased by 22 percent, about 15,000 patients. On a bright note, the number of major operations has only declined six percent with decreases in Jerusalem and Hebron being offset by a gratifying increase of 36 percent in Gaza. Looking at July data alone, the decline in outpatient numbers is on the same trend line, but volume of surgeries is recovering. Hebron numbers were especially weak given the COVID hotspot commented on above.

Financially, our CEO Dr. Ahmad Ma'ali and his team are doing a magnificent job. They reduced operational expenditures in the first seven months of the year by almost $2 million while maintaining high quality and safe delivery of care. This containment of spending has been greater than the decline in patient-related income. Regarding furloughed employees who were brought back to employment, we secured a grant of approximately $150,000 from the Israeli Government. In addition, we received a grant of $75,000 from the PA through the Jerusalem Council.

In terms of raising our stature in the region, our team has also placed St John at the forefront of providers responding to the pandemic, having signed a strategic agreement with the Ministry of Health. The Palestinian Authority converted the Hugo Chavez Eye Hospital to a COVID-19 Center thus driving surgical patients from this facility into our eyecare facilities. In addition, good cooperation with the Israeli authorities has led to an increase of 20 percent in billing to Israel's Sick Fund.

While we are finding ways to survive the pandemic, support for the Eye Hospital Group from Priories around the world is essential. The ability of the Palestinian Authority to pay our bills is and will remain challenged. Financial aid from the United States government has been curtailed. Aid from the European Union will provide a small offset. A portion of the EU grant of €10 million (approx. $ 11 million) will be directed to multiple hospitals in East Jerusalem. In turn, a portion of the Hospital allotment will benefit St John.

I look forward to providing you regular updates on our progress in St John Eye Hospital Group.

Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum,
David Pyott, CBE, MD (Hon) OStJ
U.S. Priory Hospitaller

JOIN FELLOW CONFRÈRES IN CONVERSATIONS THIS FALL

This season the Priory is hosting over a dozen special interest coffee hours and cocktail hours, virtually. Distance and COVID-19 are no obstacle. Most gatherings are small group meetings that allow twenty or so Members to get together as if in the same room. A few are larger events, with space for as many Members as wish to attend. Please join us!

Each gathering is subject matter-oriented, featuring an invited guest or guests from somewhere in the world of St John, experts in the topic being discussed.

The next four scheduled meetings are:

• Wednesday evening, Sept 23rd – Hosting Virtual Regional Events – 7:30PM Eastern, 4:30PM Pacific – Guest: Richard Payatt, Sommelier – small group meeting

• Saturday morning, Sept 26th – Treasures of the Order Museum – 11:30AM Eastern, 8:30 AM Pacific – Guests: Julian Calder and Tom Foakes, photographer and writer, respectively, of the book Treasures – larger group meeting

• Thursday morning, Oct 1st – Being Clergy in the Order – 11:30AM Eastern, 8:30 AM Pacific – Guest: Priory Sub-Prelate The Rev’d. Dr. Russell J. Levenson, Jr., Rector of St Martin's Episcopal Church, Houston – small group meeting

• Saturday morning, Oct 10th - The Strategic Perspective from Inside the Eye Hospital Group – Noon Eastern, 9:00 AM Pacific – Guests: Sir Andrew Cash, Chairman SJEHG, and David Pyott, Order Hospitaller – small group meeting

More events will be announced monthly. To request to attend a gathering, please email your interest to Diana McCormick, our Director of Membership and Events, at DMcCormick@saintjohn.org.

Note: Admission to small gatherings is on a first-to-request, first-granted basis. If you would like to see a meeting arranged for an Order-related interest you have, or a guest invited that you would particularly like to hear from, please contact Jim Terzian, Priory Registrar, at jimterzian@live.com.
U.S. PRIORY STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
SETTING GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

by Dennis C. Hensley, KStJ
Strategic Planning Committee Chairman

The Strategic Planning Committee of the U.S. Priory expects to present a new strategic plan to the leadership and Chapter at its October meeting. The plan will contain a set of focused goals for the Priory for the next five years. Decisions will then be made as to which groups within the Priory will be given responsibility for developing plans to implement the goals.

The Priory has not had an updated strategic plan for many years. The effort to develop a new plan has been under way for a while. The Strategic Planning Committee was set up a few years ago, but the committee decided last fall to delay any definitive work on a plan until new leadership was in place. In anticipation of, and at the direction of, that new leadership the Committee sprang into action shortly after St John’s Day.

The Committee membership was reconstituted early this summer. Significant effort was taken to assure the Committee includes members representative of various geographic regions, grades and years of service in the Order. The committee was kept small to assure we will complete our task in a timely manner. The committee members are Thomas Cerruti, OStJ; Paul Coombs, MStJ; Sharon Moore, OStJ; Bruce Spivey, KStJ; David Trebing, CStJ; and Linda Ziglar, OStJ. I serve as chair.

The Committee has been hard at work, often meeting several hours a week. Due to COVID-19, all meetings are virtual. After an interview process, the Committee hired Capacity Partners, a consulting firm, to assist in this project. The Committee is revising the Priory’s mission and vision statements and reviewing the International Order’s values statement as a model for the Priory. Dozens of key “stakeholders” inside and outside the Priory have been interviewed and all Priory members are being asked to complete a survey. The data gathered from those efforts will be analyzed by the Committee to distill the most important strategic issues for the Priory to address over the next five years. The Committee will then set forth strategic goals to address those issues. As noted, the Committee will present its proposed plan and background report to leadership and Chapter in October.

While it is too early to determine any of the ultimate issues and goals, thus far the Committee has found a great deal of unity among Priory members on key issues.

Like all U.S. Priory Committees, Strategic Planning holds meetings virtually.

While it is too early to determine any of the ultimate issues and goals, thus far the Committee has found a great deal of unity among Priory members on key issues. Membership in the Order is very important to most Members, and they are dedicated to the continuing success of the Priory into the future. With such a strong existing foundation, the Committee is assured our strategic plan will only enable the Priory to move to even higher achievements in years to come.
SMILE! “GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER.”

by John Macaskill, OStJ, Treasurer, and Jane Heath, OStJ

Did you know you can support the Order and the Jerusalem Eye Hospital while shopping from home? It’s just one of many ways we can help our lords, the sick and the poor in addition to our annual oblations.

If you use Amazon, simply access your account through smile.amazon.com. It’s exactly like using Amazon.com, except a portion of what you spend goes to a charity of your choice.

While the portion donated by Amazon is relatively small, just 0.5% of your eligible purchases, with 1,600 members in the U.S., it can add up to a substantial donation. You can invite family and friends to participate as well.

Once you’ve selected “Priory in the USA of the Order of St John” as your chosen charity, simply bookmark AmazonSmile on your desktop, so you go through the AmazonSmile portal, and/or put the AmazonSmile app on your phone.

In addition to using AmazonSmile, you can also:

• Check with your employer to see if your company has a matching fund for donations you make to charities.
• Set up an estate plan to give through your will, and/or life insurance policies.
• Set up your monthly or annual giving to the Order on a credit card to accrue “miles” or other rewards.
• Gift appreciated stocks to the Order, especially when tax season approaches.

Assuming a donor is in a higher tax bracket, here’s an example of how donating stock to a charity often makes sense from a financial perspective:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purchase price</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sale price</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gain</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Federal capital gains tax of 20%</td>
<td>$800</td>
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<tr>
<td>State capital gains tax of 13.3% (for CA)</td>
<td>$532</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Net without donating</strong></td>
<td><strong>$3,668</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>If donated, federal tax saved</td>
<td>$1,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If donated, state tax saved (for CA)</td>
<td>$665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net with charitable tax deduction</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2,485</strong></td>
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</table>

In the above example, a difference of $1,183 less in pocket, amounts to a donation to the Order of a full $5,000, enough to cover the cost of multiple surgeries for people in need!

AmazonSmile allows you to track donations to your chosen charity. As of August 2020, the U.S. Priory has received $1,139 from the program, just through people shopping at home.

If you’re interested in donating stock, contact Executive Director Michele Blair at mblair@saintjohn.org.

Whether through annual oblations, or day to day shopping on AmazonSmile, however and whenever you give, your contributions change lives, for the faith, and in service to mankind.
THE ST JOHN AMBULANCE FIRST AID KIT

by Tom Foakes, MStJ
Treasures author

A feature in homes and in workplaces across the globe, a first aid kit is something that is so commonplace and is such an obvious necessity that it is given little thought or attention. However, this practical compendium, containing simple everyday items such as sticking plasters and bandages, was revolutionary in its 19th century conception and it is the charity St John that was responsible.

Before the formation of St John Ambulance the provision of free medical care to all was a noble aspiration, which bore little relation to the lived experience of those most in need of such a universal service, the poor and the vulnerable. With the foundation of the St John Ambulance Association in 1877, to provide free first aid training, and in 1887 the St John Ambulance Brigade, to offer free first aid assistance wherever the public required it, St John positioned itself at the heart of communities—where it has remained ever since.

While compassion and empathy are key components of patient care, since the first Hospitaller Knights in Jerusalem in the 11th century, St John has always been at the cutting edge of medical advancement. The silver plate and herbal remedies used in the medieval period ensured that sick pilgrims received the best available care; during the First World War the Order’s Field Hospital at Étaples exploited x-ray and electro-cardiograph technology to aid effective treatment of battlefield casualties; and today St John volunteers continue to provide exemplary assistance with the latest medical equipment.

Yet the humble first aid kit endures as the cornerstone of St John’s global caring mission. In 1879 it was Sir John

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1940s tin toys representing two volunteers and the ambulance “Sympathy.”
WHICH CAME FIRST?

Which came first, St John Ambulance or the Red Cross? It’s a simple question, with a somewhat complex answer that involves multiple “founded in” dates.

The Saint John Ambulance Association was founded in England in 1877, though the first uniformed responders, the Saint John Ambulance Brigade, didn’t muster until 10 years later, being founded in 1887. Today, the two are one association, St John Ambulance.

The idea of the Red Cross came to Switzerland’s Henry Dunant in 1859 after he saw the aftermath of the battle of Solferino, in Italy. Henry organized people to bandage soldiers’ wounds. The Red Cross was subsequently formed in 1863 in Switzerland when Henry and others set up the International Committee for Relief to the Wounded, later renamed the International Committee of the Red Cross. The Red Cross’s emblem, the red cross on a white background, is the inverse of the Swiss flag, a white cross on a red background.

The American Red Cross was established in Washington D.C. in 1881 by Clara Barton, who became the organization’s first president. Today the Red Cross operates as the Red Crescent in Muslim countries, and as Magen David Adom (the Red Star of David) in Israel.

So, by official founding dates, the international Red Cross (1863) beats St John Ambulance (1877) by 14 years, while the American Red Cross (1881) comes in third, four years after St John Ambulance.

However, as the history of St John Ambulance is directly linked to the founding of the Knights Hospitaller by Pope Pascal II’s papal bull of 1113, then the most venerable Order, and by association St John Ambulance, wins by 750 years.