



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

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## National Day of Service 2026



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## INTERVIEW WITH PRIOR NIGEL HEATH, KSTJ

**Your term as Prior began in 2020—just as COVID had hit the U.S. and the country was in lock-down. How did that impact your vision of how best to move the Priory forward during that first year of your term?**

It certainly forced us all to look into new ways of doing so much of what we had considered customary in the past. One of the hardest things was not being able to meet people in person at regional gatherings. I would have liked to travel to our regions to get to hear Confrères' ideas, concerns, and suggestions.

I had already been pondering the idea of virtual meetings as a way to share leadership across the country, and that was accelerated as we quickly learnt and adapted to Zoom meetings and presentations.

While none of us would have chosen to go through the pandemic and the loss of so many, there were certain positive repercussions in the immediate and the longer term. In the short term, the feeling of camaraderie and "we can do this together" attitude of so many of our members was amazing. Delivering bags of groceries to doorsteps, sewing masks for essential workers, writing to the lonely, calling those confined to their homes and offering support, etc. This "can-do" attitude was seen in the Priory's St John Volunteer Corps (SJVC) activities across the country. Confrères recorded readings and music remotely to create an amazing online Investiture service.

Dealing with the effects of COVID in those early months showed me that the Priory, like the original brothers and knights in Jerusalem, are willing to serve *our Lords the sick and the poor*, not just when it is easy and convenient but also when it is hard and inconvenient. Our sacrificial attitude to service to our Order and those suffering great hardship is what makes us an Order of Chivalry and not simply a faith or a social organization. Seeing this generosity in action inspired me to be bolder and braver in my expectations for the first three, and ultimately the six years that lay ahead.

### **What has been the biggest challenge during your term as Prior?**

The simplest and shortest general answer is "time." The possibilities of what we can achieve within our organization are boundless, but even the Prior cannot add more hours to the 24 in each day, neither for himself nor others!

Specifically, the October 7th attack and all its immediate and ongoing repercussions. I had been in Gaza not long before with both patients and staff, and I wondered every day about the young teenage boy I spoke to before his treatment and the SJEHG staff nurse who was our translator and a great help. The day that I learnt she had had been killed in a refugee camp while getting water for her young son was the worst and hardest day of my term. We talk about our St. John Eye Hospital Group (SJEHG) team as a family, and I have been blessed to be welcomed into that family. So that loss was extremely painful and personal.

Not to be morbid, but another death also posed a challenge to my term. My predecessor, Palmer Hamilton, KStJ, died just over a year into my term. His unexpected death not only meant the loss of a friend and colleague (I had served six years with him as the Priory's Treasurer), but it also meant we lost a confidant and a wealth of Priory knowledge.

We have a saying in our family, "make a plan and God laughs." And each time a plan has been delayed or derailed, those are of course challenging times. Yet in many ways those are the situations that I have found most fulfilling. I love challenges and finding solutions to problems.

On a personal level, of course, juggling my role as Prior with that of my business life and personal life as a husband, father, and grandfather, as well as other roles in the community has been an ongoing challenge. It means early mornings and late nights, but thanks to the support of many friends and colleagues, and most of all to my wife, Jane, whose support and willingness to do whatever is needed has enabled me, at times, to be in two places at once!

**You have many accomplishments that, as Prior, you can be proud of during your term—increased support to the St. John Eye Hospital Group, expansion and diversification of the Priory's membership and leadership, and modernization and further development of the St John Volunteer Corps (SJVC), among them. What is the one thing you are MOST proud of?**

Hard to pick one thing but if I have to choose ...

Simply continuing the work of our ancient and historic Order of serving *our Lords the sick and the poor* in ways and places that others deem too difficult. To be responsible for the leadership and growth of the selfless generosity of the time, talent, and treasure of our members that has enabled, including:

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# THE PRIORY TRADITION OF SERVICE CONTINUES

What day is it when you have 17 regions, one province, over 125 volunteers, and 24 service organizations across the country coming together with the common mission of serving *our Lords the sick and the poor*? The Priory National Day of Service (NDOS), of course!

Saturday, May 16th was the fourth annual NDOS, with some regions holding their service events in the weeks prior to and after the official day. Established by the national committee of the St John Volunteer Corps (SJVC), the day was filled with camaraderie, connection, and a shared sense of purpose. This coordinated nationwide service day, held the third Saturday in May, has grown since it began and the results continue to impress, with stories of newfound connections and joy in helping the communities in which our members live and work.

(one build site and two ReStore shops), Fisher House, and Sitter and Barfoot Veterans Care Center were hubs of activity for volunteers. The **Charleston Region** also chose to serve at Fisher House, performing much-needed tasks including reorganizing the kitchen and housekeeping cabinets, power-washing porches and sidewalks, and cleaning all inside windows.

The issue of food insecurity was once again a major focus of Priory volunteers this year, with the **Houston, Los Angeles,**

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**Richmond Region**

One of the most inspiring aspects of the National Day of Service was how it brought together individuals from across the Regions. In a country as large as the United States, with some Regions comprising more than half a dozen states, it is easy to feel disconnected from each other. The National Day of Service gave volunteers an opportunity to step outside their normal service routines to work side-by-side to make positive impacts in their broader communities. As they worked together and

shared their stories, experiences, and expertise, it was clear that these new connections continue to build and strengthen the Priory's SJVC program.

These stories exemplify the power of coming together in the service of humanity. In a fellowship of service, members were truly able to have an impact on their communities. In the **Richmond Region**, three Habitat for Humanity sites



**Houston Region**



**Los Angeles Region**



**Charleston Region**



**St. Louis Region**



San Francisco Region

**St. Louis, and San Francisco Regions** volunteering at local food banks.

In the **Greenwich Region**, Priory volunteers were busy sorting the donated food by type and then checking the expiration dates at the Neighbor to Neighbor food pantry—something that NTN staff indicated can usually take a week for them to complete. Most importantly, members of the region, including two of the Priory's newly-appointed Confrères, rolled up their sleeves to volunteer and brought their kids, husbands, and wives to join the fun.

Keeping with the St. John Eye Hospital Group's mission of "Saving Sight, Changing Lives," the **Birmingham Region** conducted vision screenings through the Cahaba Valley

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Birmingham Region



Gulf Coast Region



Greenwich Region



Connecticut Region



Healthcare Clinic for 23 residents from a downtown Birmingham homeless shelter for men.

The overwhelming sentiment expressed by all who participated in the National Day of Service was a sense of connection and fulfillment. The impact of these collective efforts was evident not only in the food boxes filled or people served, but also in the personal growth and the strengthened sense of purpose felt by each volunteer. Through this shared dedication and hard work, members of the U.S. Priory showed that when people come together for a common cause, they can accomplish great things and make a lasting difference in the lives of others. As we reflect on the success of the National Day of Service, we look forward to future opportunities to serve together. ✨





*From first aid education in schools to professional ambulance services, St John South Africa equips people of all ages with lifesaving skills and provides emergency medical care throughout the community.*

## ST JOHN SOUTH AFRICA: 140 YEARS OF SERVICE

A single anecdote says much about the Order of St John in South Africa and its importance to the nation it serves. As Vanya Basto-Pinto, the Priory's Director of Corporate Social Investment, explains, "We are a bridge across divides—In a country still navigating the legacy of apartheid and profound socio-economic inequality, St John is one of the few organisations that has genuinely operated across racial, geographic, and class lines for over 140 years. Nelson Mandela—himself a Bailiff Grand Cross of the Order—reportedly said upon his release from prison in 1990, when asked if he needed medical attention: 'Not to worry, I'll go to my friends at St John.' That relationship of trust, built across generations, is our most valuable asset."

That relationship of trust has been developed through the delivery of a multitude of critical services across six of the nation's nine provinces. St John South Africa is recognized nationwide for providing first aid training and coverage at major public events such as marathons, cycling tours, soccer matches, and motorsport events; disaster relief support alongside government agencies; community care at old age homes, children's homes, hospitals, and clinics; and community health and outreach in underserved areas.

And just how, you might wonder, do they manage to deliver this vast, resource-intensive array of services with fewer than 1,000 Members? It is through a veritable army of volunteers known as the Brigade, the actual heartbeat of the Priory. Hundreds of South Africans, from elementary school

students to retired professionals, join the ranks to provide the operational manpower for the Order's mission on the ground.

Two programs are especially important to South Africans and are most closely associated with the work of the Order: first aid training and eye care. St John is widely regarded as the

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*Nelson Mandela, GCStJ, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, GCStJ, wearing the mantle of the Order of St John in South Africa. Both held the rank of Bailiff Grand Cross.*



*Graduates of a First Aid training program.*

home of first aid in South Africa. According to Basto-Pinto, “For many South Africans, their first—and sometimes only—formal exposure to first aid is through St John.”

The Priory is the oldest and only charitable provider of expert, affordable optometric care, with 10 St John Eye Care Centers operating across six provinces. The centers serve the approximately 80% of South Africans who rely on the public healthcare system. This single service has an enormous social impact since vision loss is a direct barrier to employment, education, and quality of life. The Priory’s Community Vision Screening Program also takes screening directly into schools and community settings, identifying individuals who need intervention and channeling them toward affordable correction. Patients from the eye care centers and community screening programs can then purchase glasses at fees calibrated to local economic conditions.

As robust as the work of the Order of St John is in South Africa, challenges remain. Sustainable funding and volunteer recruitment/retention are as much a concern here as among

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*Queen Elizabeth II visiting St John South Africa in Cape Town with the Duke of Edinburgh Prince Philip (1995).*



*Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela, both distinguished members of the Order of St John in South Africa, exemplified leadership rooted in compassion, reconciliation, and service to others.*



*St John South Africa operates 10 eye care centers across six of the country’s nine provinces*



## PRO FIDE TRUSTEES OF HOPE

### The Ground We Stand On

The St. John eye hospital in the Holy Land has been open for over a century. The St John Eye Hospital Group has seen occupations, wars, blockades, bombardments, and

the kind of sustained pressure that exposes, without mercy, whether an institution's deepest commitments are real or merely rhetorical. The staff has remained faithful. The patients have come. The work has continued.



That fact stands as the argument for everything that follows.

There is a baby named Bilal, born prematurely and with severely underdeveloped eyes, who came to the eye hospital because there was nowhere else with the capacity to help him. There is a nurse named Ahmed who

trained at that hospital because there was no other institution in Palestine with its level of training. There is a six-year-old named Luma whose severe squint was caught early enough to avoid surgery because a weekly pediatric clinic existed that could see her.

The Order of St John exists so that Bilal can see, Ahmed can serve, and Luma keeps her sight before anyone would have otherwise noticed. Each of us, as confrères of the Order of St John are trustees of Bilal, Ahmed, and Luma's hope. We are trustees of hope.

We are called to serve, and our task is the work of a hope partnership. That is what trustees of hope do. And that is what this reflection is about.

### The Discipline of Listening

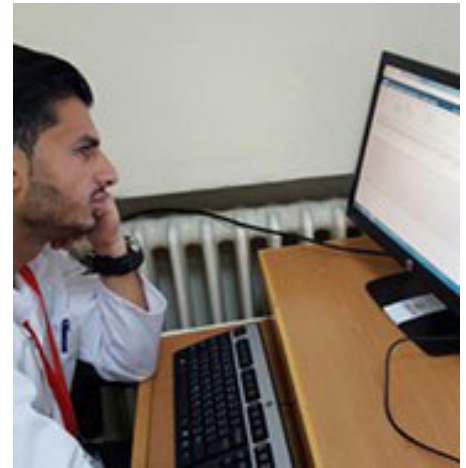
Hope as a discipline begins in the refusal of abstraction. The eleventh-century founding hospitallers cared for the exhausted human being who arrived before them today, in particular. The first discipline of a trustee of hope is to listen in a way that costs something, the way genuine listening always does.

Listening that costs something means setting aside the reflex to say what you want long enough to actually hear. It means asking open rather than probing questions.

### The Discipline of Becoming Fellow Pilgrims

To be a trustee of hope is to get over your desire to control and lean into the work of accompaniment. The discipline of hope that

has sustained a century of work in and around Gaza was maintained by communities of people who renewed their conviction in the worth of the human beings they served, returned repeatedly to the source of that conviction, and refused to allow the surrounding circumstances to rob the person before them of their dignity.



### The Discipline of Partnership

The Order's founding instinct encoded its understanding of role in its motto: *Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum*: For the faith, in the service of humanity. To be a trustee of hope means that, as a confrère, we seek to operate in both registers simultaneously for each other, and those who entrust their care to us.

"For the faith" means to hold the institution's deepest convictions, its understanding of who the human being is and why their flourishing matters, against the pressure of every practical argument for compromise.

"In the service of humanity" means to be accountable to the specific human beings whose flourishing is what the institution exists to produce.

In these two actions of carrying the burdens of others, we become trustees of hope for those who access the health care we provide and trustees of hope for one another.



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## The Discipline of Shared Practice

The Order of St John was founded when Benedictine monks built a chapel at the center of the hospice. The work and the worship were never alternatives. The worship was the condition of the work: the repeated return to the ground of human dignity, the renewal of the conviction that the person in front of you is worth your best care regardless of what the surrounding circumstances are offering.

Each of us carries a responsibility as a trustee of hope to share the work together. We each give what we can to the good of the Lord's poor and sick.

Yet, there is more here; we don't see the wider organization as a quid pro quo. Instead, we recognize the privilege of serving and the privilege of being seen for our service. That is, we are both givers of God's grace and receivers of God's grace. Each of us shares a responsibility of denying the world's economic practice and instead embracing our Lord's practice of giving without return. This is the discipline of sharing the practice of grace multiplying instead of being after what I can get.

## ST JOHN SOUTH AFRICA *continued from page 7*

non-profit organizations worldwide. Additionally, Basto-Pinto says that access to healthcare in the country's vast sub-urban and rural areas is an especially difficult barrier. "South Africa's profound socio-economic disparities mean the communities most in need of our services are also the most difficult to reach and sustain programmatically."

Challenges notwithstanding, the St John leadership in South Africa is continually innovating and expanding services. This year, the organization is launching the Little Lifesavers program, a first aid training initiative for children aged 10 to 14. The program is designed to embed life-saving skills in young South Africans as both a health intervention and a character-formation initiative with generational impact.

When asked what else members of the U.S. Priory should know about their South African counterparts, Basto-Pinto replied with a thought we can all embrace: "We are part of something ancient and enduring—The Order of St John dates to 1099. That continuum of purpose—caring for the sick and vulnerable, regardless of faith, politics, or status—runs unbroken through our work today. In a world of short institutional attention spans, that depth of tradition is both a responsibility and an extraordinary privilege." ✨

## A Closing Word

The donor who writes a check from a position of security needs the discipline of hope as much as the surgeon operating in a tent in a refugee camp funded by that check. The person receiving care needs it as much as the leader setting institutional strategy. Hope as a discipline is the property of no rank or station. It is our common inheritance, available to all, and required of all.

Bilal, born prematurely, eyes barely formed, arrived at a hospital that was still there because people refused to leave. Ahmed trained in a place that existed because someone decided a century ago that Palestinian clinicians deserved the same formation as any other. Luma kept her sight because a weekly clinic, funded, governed, and prayed over by communities like ours, caught what would otherwise have been missed.

That is the work. That is the honor. That is what it means to be trustees of hope.

The Rt. Rev. C Andrew Doyle, D.D., OStJ  
Sub Prelate



*St John South Africa provides first aid training for people of all ages, from school-age children to workplace first aiders*

***One of the most important things that we can do is bring hope and community where little exists. In the Holy Land and at home this means setting the example that we serve one community regardless of race, religion, or other means of discrimination.***

If something is not achieved or a goal is not met, I simply look to the future to see what other options or opportunities this stumbling block may present.

***As you wind down your second term as Prior and over 14 continuous years as either a Regional Chair, member of the Priory Chapter, or Priory Officer and rejoin the ranks as simply a “member of the Order of St John,” what’s next on your “to-do” list?***

Celebrate and play with my new grandson. The end of my term and his arrival are due to pretty much coincide, and I plan to make spending time with my grandchildren Emma, Olivia, and “baby brother” a priority. There is so much of my life that I have put on hold, willingly because I committed to being Prior and have taken its responsibilities very seriously, but I look forward to a new chapter and new possibilities. To spend a whole day with my wife without meetings, emails, and phone calls!

- The establishment of the Pediatric screening program. The first in the Holy Land, which has already treated more than 141,000 children and is saving sight for \$10 per child.
- The continuous care we have provided in Gaza despite a war and closed borders. I am continually amazed and impressed that the dedicated SJEHG Gaza staff treat 1,000+ patients each week in this desperately difficult environment.
- The creation (and recent doubling in size and capacity) of the Kufor Aqab facility serving the desperate population in Ramallah that cannot reach Jerusalem.
- And the opening of the hospital in Nablus—a spectacular state-of-the-art facility serving a population of over two million in the northern West Bank.

***Any regrets? If so, what is your biggest regret?***

That I could not achieve everything, implement all the good ideas that members suggested, meet everyone, or raise even more desperately needed funds. I like to focus on the positive, so I try not to have regrets.

Neither of us is good at doing nothing, but maybe one day of nothing is called for. I look forward to continuing to visit the Holy Land and SJEHG when our CEO Dr. Ahmad Ma’ali says it is safe to visit, and to supporting our new Priory leadership team in whatever ways I can to further the work of our Priory.

***What challenges do you see currently facing the Order of St John, and indeed other international service organizations?***

The biggest challenge to the Order and indeed most service organizations is how to adapt and keep pace with the changes in a rapidly changing world so that they remain valid and relevant, while also staying true to our historic traditions. International organizations are powerful in their ability to share worldwide goals, promote conversations, and raise awareness of issues on a global scale. I believe, however, their greatest power comes from their knowledge of the different strengths and weaknesses of the many cultures and traditions they represent. Fully exploring and understanding those we serve and being able to adapt to changing parameters is, to me, key—as I said before, “make a plan and God laughs.”

***What do you see as the opportunities to make the biggest impact given the strengths of our organization?***

To continually evaluate the strengths of our organization and to understand those we aim to serve by listening and engaging with them. For me this has been done by talking every week with members of our SJEHG staff and, whenever possible, visiting them in person. Here at home it means donning my SJVC apron and engaging with local service opportunities as well as with other Order members and community leaders.

One of the most important things that we can do is bring hope and community where little exists. In the Holy Land and at home this means setting the example that we serve one community regardless of race, religion, or other means of discrimination. Giving to the best of our ability the most meaningful and generous gifts of time, talent, and treasure, to make the biggest impact.

***Any other parting thoughts?***

I encourage all my fellow Confrères to be fully engaged in our Order and all it asks of each of us. It has been a privilege to work with you at home and around the world. Thank you.

Blessings to John and the new leadership team who no doubt will rise to the new challenges and grow and develop our Priory to new heights of service to *our Lords the sick and the poor*.

*Pro fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum.* ✨