



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

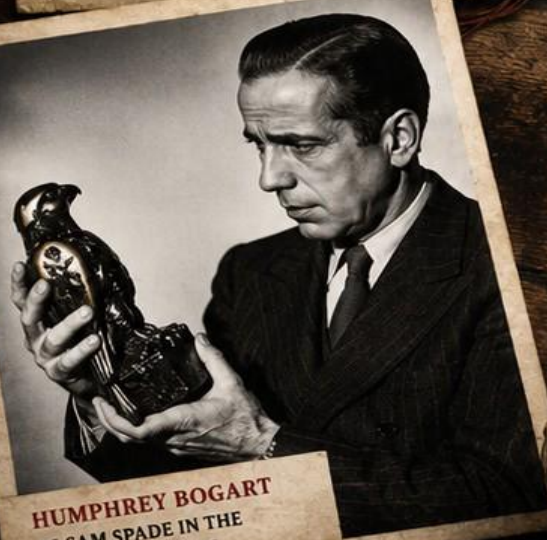
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1530

THE IMPERIAL DEED
GRANTING MALTA TO
THE KNIGHTS OF ST JOHN



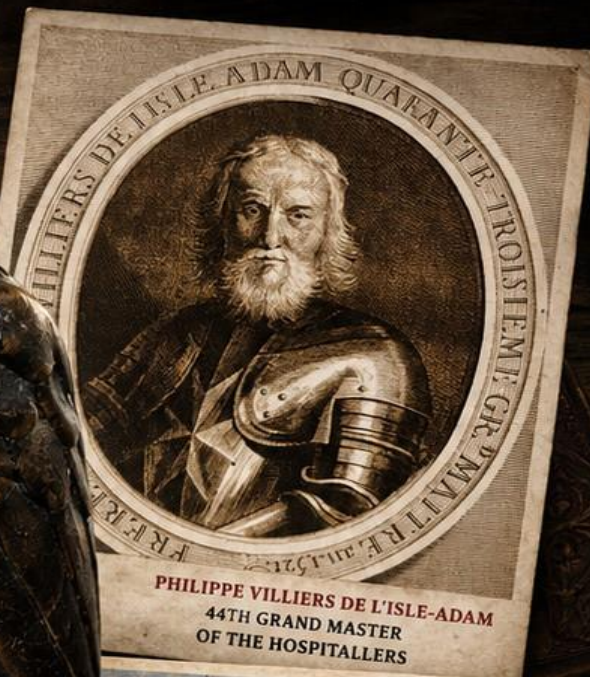
HUMPHREY BOGART
AS SAM SPADE IN THE
1941 FILM CLASSIC

ONE BIRD. FIVE CENTURIES.

*The Falcon of Malta:
From Chivalric Tribute
to Sam Spade's San Francisco*

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Since 1908
John's Grill
STEAKS & SEAFOOD
63 COCKTAILS



PHILIPPE VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM
44TH GRAND MASTER
OF THE HOSPITALLERS



*The Fairmont Hotel,
San Francisco, California*



THE
MALTESE
FALCON

BY
DASHIELL
HAMMETT
AUTHOR OF
THE DAIN CURSE



THE KNIPHAUSEN HAWK
A JEWELLED CEREMONIAL VESSEL
MADE ca. 1697



INTERVIEW WITH PRIOR JOHN MACASKILL, KSTJ

As “The American Society,” the U.S. Establishment of the Order of St John has existed since 1957. Since our elevation to full Priory status 30 years ago, we’ve had only four Priors. What are your thoughts stepping into the role as our fifth Prior?

There are so many talented and experienced confrères that I believe we can create so much value—not necessarily monetary value alone—if we can help confrères to share their “time, talent and treasure.”

Having been Treasurer of the Priory for the last six years, I have a fairly good idea of what is expected of me as the fifth Prior but joining both The Executive Committee (“TEC”) and Grand Council will be new experiences which I look forward to. Each Prior has had to deal with their own unique challenges. Nick Drexel, being the first, had to get the Priory onto its feet. Marshall Acuff expanded and was a wonderful ambassador for our Priory. Palmer Hamilton moved the office to Washington, which I believe was a very positive move, and Nigel Heath had to deal with COVID while driving donations to the hospital to new levels.

All five of them knew that the Priory’s first focus was and remains to financially support the Eye Hospital Group in Jerusalem. As trustee of the hospital for eight years, I, too, understand the need to support the hospital and I have seen firsthand that financial support turns into vitally needed eyecare. The need is now greater than ever given the situation in Gaza and the West Bank.

What is your vision for the Priory during your term (or terms), and do you have specific goals related to that vision?

I would like to see our financial support for the hospital group continue to grow so that the hospital can continue to treat more of the poor and sick who desperately need this care. We must identify new sources of funding beyond the confrères to reach these new goals. The greatest asset our Priory has is its membership. There are so many talented and experienced confrères that I believe we can create so much value—not

necessarily monetary value alone—if we can help confrères to share their “time, talent and treasure.” If each of us starts to think about how we might achieve these new challenges, we will find the way of reaching new donors who wish to support such a worthwhile cause.

As both a unique charity and a membership Order whose members are appointed by HM King Charles III, we should take pride in our membership and enjoy one another’s company. I would like each of our 20 regions and two provinces to hold a social gathering at least twice a year if not once each quarter and to invite non-member friends of confrères to join us.

I have been known to refer to the Order of St John as a “clandestine charity,” as so few people outside of its membership know anything about the Order. One of my goals for 2027 is that each region will identify 10 St John churches within their region and on the Sunday closest to St John’s Day on the 24th June, 10 confrères from each will go to those churches and give a short talk on the history of the Order and what it does today supporting the Eye Hospital Group. Your Chancellor and I each went to a St John Church this last June to “try it out” and I can report that not only was the talk well received by both their rectors but also by the congregations. During coffee hour after the service people were asking questions and saying, “I had no idea about the Order or about the work it is doing around the world.” The collections of each church were donated to the Order and I subsequently received an email from one person saying that he had donated to the U.S. Priory as a result. If we reach 200 churches, we will be telling our story to a great many non-members, some who may become members, some who may donate funds, but we will become less “clandestine.”

My third goal is that we must find a way to become attractive to the larger foundations so that we can seek larger donations from them and enable the Eye Hospital Group to treat yet more patients.

What do you see as the biggest challenges the Priory is currently facing, and how do you plan to address them?

We must continue to grow as a Priory. We must continue to attract more donations from different sources in addition to confrères. We need to recognize that volunteer work benefits both the volunteer and the beneficiary and that if we can create the right approach this will continue to highlight the work of the Priory and the Order to non-members while helping others.

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ONE BIRD, EVERY YEAR

THE FALCON OF MALTA: FROM CHIVALRIC TRIBUTE TO SAM SPADE'S SAN FRANCISCO



Falcon replica

In March of 1530, Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, put his signature to one of the most remarkable documents in the history of Christian chivalry. The Knights of St John had just been granted Malta, Gozo, and Tripoli as a sovereign domain, held in feudal perpetuity: cities, castles, islands, jurisdiction over life and death - the whole apparatus of medieval lordship, set down in formal Latin on imperial vellum.

And the annual rent? A falcon, to be presented each

year on the Feast of All Saints to the Emperor's viceroy in Sicily, "in sign and recognition of feudal tenure."



Deed of Donation

One bird, every year. But what did this falcon actually signify in the world the knights and emperor inhabited?

"A peppercorn signaled a nominal superiority, a rose a substantial tenure held of grace, and a falcon a render of the highest symbolic kind," said historian and philosopher Craig Paterson, OstJ, FSA Scot. Malta's peregrines were famed throughout Europe as among the finest hunting birds of the age, prized by courts and noble households alike. "Presented each All Saints' Day to the Viceroy of Sicily," Craig adds, "the falcon made visible the bond between Charles and the Order, an annual act of fealty rendered on a feast day liturgically tied to the Order's own titular patron."



Philippe Villiers de L'Isle-Adam

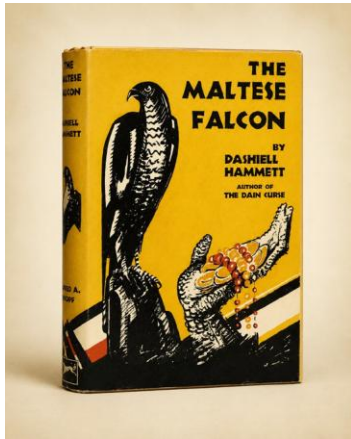
They could not have imagined that four centuries later, an ex-Pinkerton detective in San Francisco would read about that falcon and see in it the perfect engine for a crime novel.

Dashiell Hammett had worked for years as an operative for the Pinkerton National Detective Agency, much of that time in San Francisco. When he turned to fiction, he brought that knowledge with him and, when he needed a legend to anchor his most enduring novel, reached back across the centuries to Malta.

The Maltese Falcon, published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1930, is a masterpiece of American prose style, a template for the hardboiled detective story and a meditation on deception and appearances that remains as sharp today as it was during the Depression. At its center lies a simple and devastating idea, delivered in a long monologue by the villain Kasper Gutman:

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that an object of incomprehensible value, a falcon statuette encrusted with jewels and fashioned by the Knights as a gift worthy of an emperor, had been lost to history, painted over and passed from hand to hand by people who had no idea what they possessed.



First edition book cover

and, when the falcon is finally unwrapped, it proves to be a fake.

Dashiell Hammett was not writing about the Hospitallers, or Malta, or the particular history that produced the grant of 1530. He was writing about greed, and about the way



Knipphausen Hawk

For the physical object itself, Dashiell Hammett is thought to have drawn upon the Knipphausen Hawk, a jewel-encrusted ceremonial vessel in the form of a bird, made in the late seventeenth century for a count of the Holy Roman Empire and acquired by the Duke of Devonshire in 1819. It has remained quietly at Chatsworth House ever since, quite unaware of the literary mayhem it may have inspired. In *The Maltese Falcon*, everyone wants the bird, no one can be trusted

human beings will destroy one another in pursuit of something that may not even exist. The falcon serves as what Alfred Hitchcock would later call a MacGuffin: the thing everyone in the story wants, whose actual nature is almost beside the point. But Hammett's MacGuffin does something Hitchcock's rarely do: it reflects upon itself. The object for which everyone sacrifices everything turns out to be mere lead painted black. Most MacGuffins are neutral plot devices; this one carries a moral judgment.

"The private eye is a direct descendant of the knight-errant, and a search for a medieval relic such as the Maltese Falcon can be thought of as the modern-day equivalent of the Grail quest," said Mark Coggins, San Francisco author and co-author of a 2026 illustrated edition of *The Maltese Falcon*. "Furthermore, noir, in film or crime fiction, works best when there is a tension between the sordid world of the characters

and their aspirations for the sublime, be it a magnificent artifact or a personal code of honor and chivalry."

The Deed of Donation, incidentally, is worth reading in the original. Charles V conveyed cities, castles and islands, "with power of life and death over males and females residing within their limits," and required a falcon in return. The disproportion is almost comic, until one understands that it was never truly about the bird at all. The annual falcon was the visible acknowledgment of a relationship: sovereignty answered by fealty, power checked by obligation, and a military-religious order bound ceremonially to the crown that had given it a home.

The grant was made to the Order now known as the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, the senior branch of the Alliance of the Orders of St John, which traces its institutional continuity directly to the medieval Hospitallers. Yet the larger inheritance

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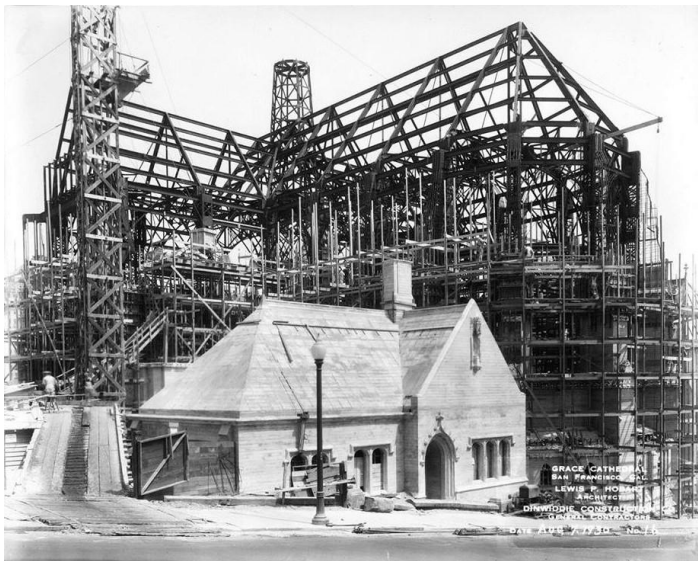


1941 movie poster

of the Hospitallers, of which the falcon is so memorable a symbol, belongs in a broader sense to the entire St John family.

Hammett's novel became a film twice before it became the film. The 1931 version was competent though it is now largely forgotten. A 1936 adaptation sought to turn the material into comedy. Then, in 1941, a first-time director named John Huston was given the story by Warner Bros., cast a 42-year-old Humphrey Bogart in the lead, and made something that still feels remarkably modern.

The *Maltese Falcon* is now recognized as the picture that effectively founded the film noir genre, establishing the visual language and moral atmosphere that would define American cinema for the better part of a decade: the deep shadows, the rain-slicked streets, the characters whose loyalties shift like fog, the protagonist who is neither villain nor hero, but something more interesting than either. Every noir that followed, from *Double Indemnity* in 1944 to *Chinatown* in 1974 and beyond, is in some way indebted to what Huston accomplished on a modest budget in the summer of 1941. He did not know he was founding a genre. He thought he was making a good picture, and he turned out to be right.



Grace Cathedral in 1931

Both film and novel are set entirely in San Francisco. This was Dashiell Hammett's city, and John Huston honored that fidelity. The fog, the hills, the mixture of respectability and vice that San Francisco has always seemed to encourage, all of it is present. Sam Spade's office is in the Hunter-Dulin Building on Sutter Street, and his apartment is on Post Street. Miles Archer, his partner, is shot in Burritt Alley off Bush Street, and a plaque marks the spot to this day for those inclined to literary pilgrimage.

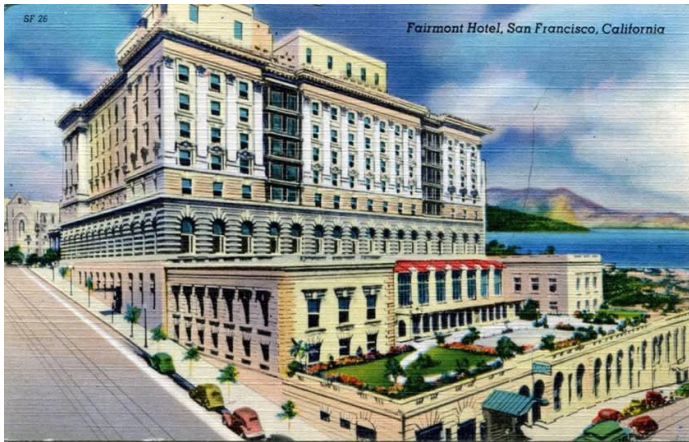
At the end of the film, after the falcon has been revealed as a fake and the surviving characters are sorting out who will go to prison and who will just go home, a police detective picks up the blackened lead bird and asks Spade what it is. Bogart's answer, added for the film and reaching back to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, is among the most famous lines in American cinema: "the stuff that dreams are made of," which, considering the bird's journey from the harbors of Malta to the fog of San Francisco, is exactly right. The falcon was always worth more as a quest than as an object, a truth understood by Charles V in 1530, by Dashiell Hammett in 1930 and by John Huston and Humphrey Bogart when they brought it to the screen in 1941.



Bogart with the falcon

This October, the Priory will convene at Grace Cathedral in the city that Dashiell Hammett walked, John Huston filmed, and Sam Spade still inhabits. The cathedral itself, an American homage to the French Gothic, was rising on Nob Hill in the very decade the novel appeared, its stones ascending through the 1930s while Hammett's San Francisco swirled below. The Fairmont Hotel, where many members will stay, was already a grand dame of the city by then, having survived the earthquake and fire of 1906 to become the kind of

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Fairmont postcard, 1930s

establishment where Kasper Gutman might have taken a suite and waited, with patience and excellent whiskey, for the falcon to come to him.

For U.S. Priory members, San Francisco will be both the setting for the annual gathering and, for those who know these tales, a place where history, legend, and fiction still keep company in the shadow of Grace Cathedral and the grand old hotels of Nob Hill.

The real falcon of Malta has returned to its rightful place in history. The Maltese Falcon, its more famous literary and cinematic descendant, lives on in fiction and shadow. And the Orders of St John, together with the lore that surrounds them, continue as they have for centuries: in sacrifice, service, and faith. ✨

JOHN'S GRILL AND "THE BLACK BIRD"

Feeding San Franciscans since 1908, John's Grill is the city's oldest steakhouse, and it has long been associated with *The Maltese Falcon*. Sam Spade dines here by name in the novel, ordering lamb chops, a baked potato and sliced tomatoes; the dish remains on the menu today as Sam Spade's Lamb Chops.

Now in its 119th year, the literary landmark maintains a dedicated room of Maltese Falcon memorabilia, including a 150-pound bronze-and-lead falcon replica installed after the original was stolen in 2007. Even a replica, it seems, inspires capers.

A 15-minute walk downhill from the Fairmont Hotel, it makes a civilized excursion. Allow roughly two hours for the outing and luncheon. Reservations are recommended, and the return up Nob Hill is best made via cable car or taxi.



ABED'S STORY

When Abed, an 85-year-old from Nablus, started experiencing blurry vision, he thought he needed new glasses. The optometrist, however, advised him to visit St John Eye Hospital in Nablus for further examination. There, he was diagnosed with cataracts in both eyes and scheduled for surgery.

He underwent his first operation in midsummer, and the second the following month. Before the surgeries, Abed could not read anymore or even see the time on his wristwatch.

After treatment, his vision improved greatly, allowing him to return to his daily activities.

Patients at St John Eye Hospital Group are asked to contribute a modest fee toward their care whenever possible. While the amount is intentionally kept affordable, this small investment encourages patients to take an active role in their treatment and recovery. Experience has shown that when patients have a personal stake in their care, they are more likely to attend follow-up appointments, carefully use prescribed medications, and follow post-operative instructions, helping to protect the gift of restored sight and achieve the best possible outcomes.

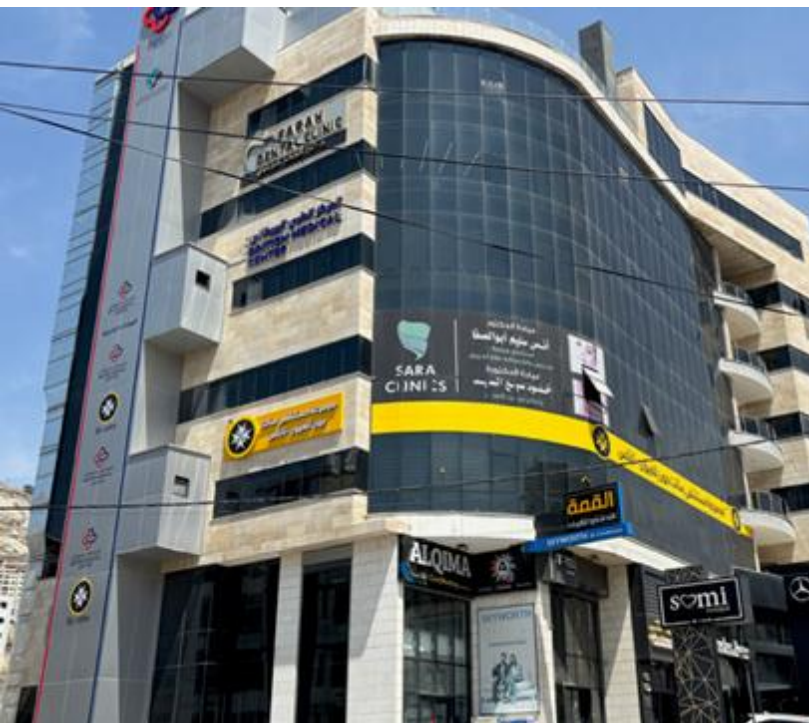
For patients like Abed, however, even these nominal fees can be beyond reach. Due to his limited financial means, he was unable to afford the cost of surgery. Thanks to support from the Qatar Fund for Development, the State of Qatar's international development agency, St John Eye Hospital Group



was able to provide the sight-saving care he needed free of charge.

Today, Abed is once again enjoying restored vision and renewed independence, a testament to how strategic partnerships help ensure that no patient is denied the opportunity to see simply because of financial hardship. ✨

A TRANSFORMATIONAL GIFT FOR THE NABLUS EYE HOSPITAL



St. John's Day observances take many forms across the country, presenting opportunities to raise funds for the St. John Eye Hospital Group (SJEHG). Mark Pigott, KBE, KStJ, made a donation in the amount of \$500,000 in honor of former Prior Nigel Heath, KStJ, whose term ended on St. John's Day. Mark included the following note with his generous gift:

Dear Nigel,

I am pleased to attach my charitable donation to the Nablus Eye Hospital in recognition of your excellent leadership as Prior of the Order of St John in the USA. Your hard work, dedication, and creative insight have enhanced the USA Priory and made an important contribution to the eye care available to those in need.

*Thank you,
Mark Pigott, KBE, KStJ*

The gift will support the construction of a second operating room in the facility, whose growth has far surpassed expectations and current capacity. Mark's gift has greatly enhanced the outreach and medical capabilities of The Nablus Hospital, in a part of the world where even the smallest successes can change lives. ✨

ST JOHN'S DAY ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND BEYOND

The Nativity of St John the Baptist is one of the church's oldest and most prominent feast days, with celebrations around the world taking many forms. While bonfires, which are traditional in many countries, did not occur among the U.S. Priory's regions this year, observances with their own local traditions brought Confrères together to worship and socialize.



Former Prior Nigel Heath with Dick Clark, KStJ

The Metropolitan Chicago Province kicked off St John's Day activities in the U.S. on June 13 with a luncheon and St John Volunteer Corps service project. After a reception and seated luncheon, members packed gift bags with personal care items for distribution by St. James Episcopal Cathedral. The event was also an opportunity to welcome Chicago's four new members of the Order.

Twenty-five Confrères and guests in the North Carolina Region held an evensong service at St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in Winston-Salem on Sunday, the 21st. Members enjoyed a champagne reception immediately after the service, followed by an informal dinner at a popular local restaurant.



Gulf Coast Members socialize before a seated dinner



Pope Leo XIV received the Grand Master of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta in recognition of the feast of our patron saint.

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Prior Macaskill addresses the Gulf Coast gathering



Gulf Coast Members with Prior John Macaskill at St. James Church



London



Jane Mermelstein addresses the gathering



NC luncheon following service



Scott Rye, MStJ, and John Busterud, KStJ, attend services in London



NC Members enjoy a reception after the Evensong

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SF Confreres Gather for St John's Day

The San Francisco Region celebrated with a reception and seated luncheon on the actual feast day, June 24. The 37 attendees, including our immediate past-prior Nigel Heath, KStJ, heard remarks from the Regional Co-chairs and raised a glass to many a toast. Proceeds from the event benefited the San Francisco Endowment Fund.

Confrères in Richmond also celebrated St John's Day on June 24, with an Evensong at Bruton Parish Episcopal Church in Colonial Williamsburg. The historic church has been in continuous use since 1715, with congregants including some of the nation's founding fathers. The church has also hosted visits by members of the British royal family, including our Grand Prior, HRH The Duke of Gloucester, during the Grand Council meeting in 2018. Several members of the Order participated in the service.

In his first official regional visit after assuming the role of Prior, John Macaskill, KStJ, celebrated with members in the Gulf Coast Region. The observance began with an evensong officiated by Regional Co-chair Rev. George Riggall at St. James



Richmond

Episcopal Church in Fairhope, Alabama. Confrères then moved to a private supper club on Mobile Bay for a reception and seated dinner. During the meal, our new prior addressed 30 attendees who traveled to Fairhope from three states, laying out his vision for the Priory and his plans to accomplish it.

The most official (and formal) of all the Order's worldwide observances took place in London on June 20, highlighted by a service of commemoration and rededication at St. Paul's Cathedral. Thirty-five members from 14 different regions in the United States attended the three-day celebration, which included a formal dinner at the Museum of the Order of St John at St John's Gate in Clerkenwell. ❄️



Luncheon at the Order of St John Museum

THE MIDDLE STONE

GRACE CATHEDRAL'S FONT AND THE SWENSON FAMILY

At Grace Cathedral, that same tradition of careful stewardship is set into the path by which the faithful come to the waters of baptism.

Near the entrance to the nave of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco stands the cathedral's bronze baptismal font, a reminder that baptism is the sacrament of entry into the Christian life. Its location allows worshippers entering the cathedral to recall their own baptism by touching the water and making the sign of the cross.

Completed in the early 1960s, the font is rich in Christian symbolism. Around its drum is a procession of figures, representing the faithful of all nations, following a banner of the Lamb of God. That image is especially resonant for members of the Order of St John, since it was John the Baptist who first recognized Jesus and proclaimed Him as the Lamb of God before Jesus' baptism.

The font is approached by three octagonal granite steps, each symbolically representing part of the transmission of the episcopate in the Episcopal Church. The lowest stone comes from Scotland, recalling the consecration of Samuel Seabury, the first Episcopal bishop in the United States, by bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church. The top stone comes from California, recalling William Ingraham Kip, who became the first Episcopal Bishop of California.

The granite material for the middle step, representing New England and Bishop Seabury's own diocese, was given by Guy A. Swenson, father of Malcolm Swenson, CStJ, and sourced from the family's Woodbury, Vermont, quarry. Formed in the Mississippian period some 300 million years ago, the granite was requested by the cathedral's then-dean, The Very Rev. Bernard Lovgren, who had been called to Grace Cathedral from St. Paul's in Concord, New Hampshire, the Swenson family's own parish.

That connection, rooted in parish life and personal friendship, was a natural one for a family whose work in stone reaches back more than three centuries in Europe, and whose American stone company began in 1883. The family's ties to the Order have continued through the generations, including



Grace Baptismal Font

the late Elizabeth Hopewell Swenson, CStJ, and David Clark Swenson, MStJ. In that same tradition, Malcolm has worked with the preservation team and leadership at St John's Gate in Clerkenwell, London, identifying historic stonework needing restoration and sourcing suitable replacement stone.

At Grace Cathedral, that same tradition of careful stewardship is set into the path by which the faithful come to the waters of baptism. Priory members gathering there for the upcoming Investiture may pass this stone without immediately noticing it, but it is part of the very fabric of the cathedral's baptismal space. The Woodbury granite step, quietly serving, remains an enduring part of that sacred place. ✱

DIGITIZING THE TREASURES OF THE MUSEUM OF THE ORDER OF ST JOHN, LONDON

Many members of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem who have travelled to London over the years have enjoyed the remarkable treasures found in the galleries of the Museum of the Order of St John at St John's Gate in Clerkenwell. The lovely permanent exhibition displays treasures that narrate the history of the Order from its inception as a hospitaller community serving pilgrims in eleventh-century Jerusalem through the reimagining of the Order as a military religious organization that protected the Mediterranean as a significant military and political force during the medieval and early modern eras. At St John's Gate today, one can see the founding legacy of the Order of St John in the establishment of St John Ambulance and the charitable activities of the Order as chartered by Queen Victoria in 1888.

However, what is not seen by most who visit the museum is the remarkable collection of manuscripts, early printed books, maps, prints, and watercolors that are housed in the great sixteenth-century tower that constitutes the original remnant of the gate. Inside this storied building one finds thousands of

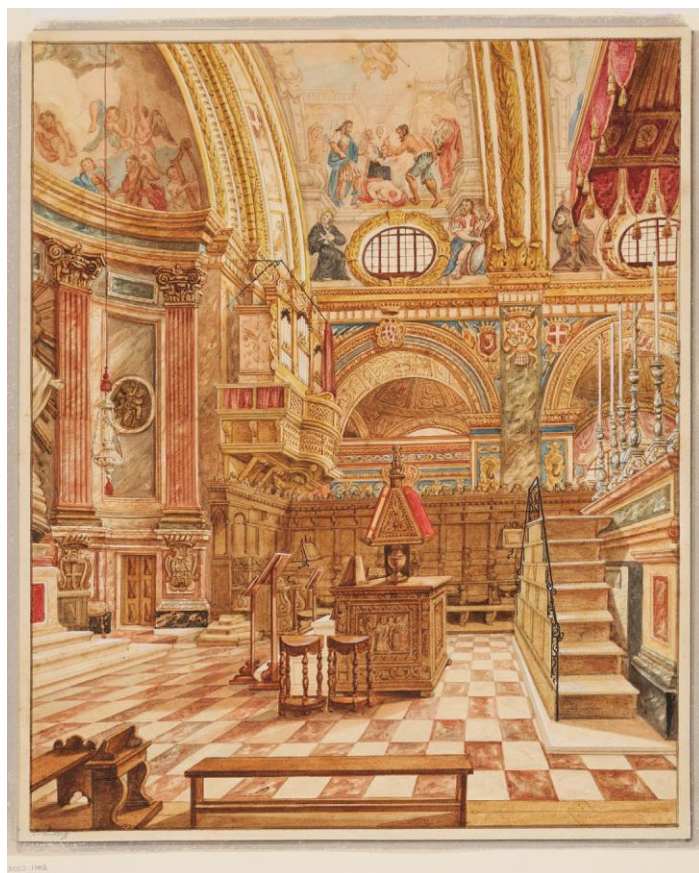


Proof of nobility for Cesare Borgia da Velletri, 1774. Images courtesy of HMML's Malta Study Center and the Museum of the Order of Saint John.

unique and precious objects collected by the early members of the revived Order of St John in England during the nineteenth century to recover their past and provide the materials to restore the Order in England. As early as 1838, members began donating books, purchasing manuscripts, and acquiring art—reconstructing their identity from their cultural heritage. Today, the museum curates a priceless collection connecting the Order's extraordinary past to the present.

In October 2023, the Malta Study Center at the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library partnered with the Museum of the Order of St John to bring these hidden treasures to the public through digitization and online access. The collection is remarkably diverse in its breadth and depth, showing how the original donors and librarians worked to build a collection representative of the Order of St John's diverse geographical and institutional history. It was found, for example, a remarkable early collection of histories about the Order, including a rare, if not unique, poem about the 1565 Great Siege of Malta written in a Sicilian dialect. A notable collection of early printed and manuscript statutes and ceremonials for

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Charles Frederick de Brocktorff. Choir of Saint John's Conventual Church, Valletta, [19th century]. Images courtesy of HMML's Malta Study Center and the Museum of the Order of Saint John.

Today, the museum curates a priceless collection connecting the Order's extraordinary past to the present.

the Order were also collected. These include an illuminated ceremonial depicting the profession of a knight. The statutes provided the foundation upon which the modern ceremonials of the Order were written, using the past to revive the present.

In addition to the library and archival material, the Museum of the Order of St John preserves a rare collection of maps and drawings. The map collection by itself is the largest cartographic collection of the Order of St John outside of Malta and includes a precious set of hand-made maps from the late 18th century. The drawing collection stands out for its watercolors, especially the invaluable drawings of the Grand Master's

Palace and St. John's Conventual Church completed by Charles Frederick Brocktorff in the early nineteenth century. These drawings are our best visual evidence of the buildings during the rule of the Knights of St John.

The digitization project at the Museum of the Order of St John is part of the larger mission of the Malta Study Center to preserve the cultural heritage of the Order. The current goal remains to complete the digitization of the museum's collection with additional funding over the next eighteen months with free online access to the collection to follow to foster our understanding of the extraordinary history of the Order of St John of Jerusalem over the centuries. The project is currently funded through the end of this year, but the project needs to raise an additional US\$150,000.00 to complete the project within the next two years. If you would like to assist, you may make a donation by credit card on the Priory website or by check made payable to The Order of St John and mailed to the Priory office. ❄

INTERVIEW WITH PRIOR JOHN MACASKILL, KSTJ *continued from page 2*

You visited the Mountain States Region before you officially began your term. How did it go? And please tell us a bit about the photos and video we've seen!

Having met the co-chairs of the Mountain States Region at the Chicago retreat, they were so keen that I come to visit them I thought, "great idea," and it was, as they are doing great things out there including a service project at which we all cleared a flower bed in a facility for mentally and physically challenged children and adults.

The photo: that is my little secret, but I can get four people to lift a fully grown person with their fingertips. Maybe as I go around the regions, I can show others how it is done.

As you begin your first term, what are you most excited about as you look ahead?

We have a talented set of leaders in the Priory who are chairing the different committees and if we can get them all working together, there is no end to what we might achieve if every one of us rises to this challenge.

Whether it is "excited" or "nervous," I am looking forward to Investiture in San Francisco, as it will be my first as your Prior and where I will officially be invested by the Lord Prior. ❄



Mountain States National Service Day



PRO FIDE

THE HONOR OF SERVICE

My father-in-law and I used to have coffee together. He lived into his nineties, and he was one of the most faithful people I have ever known, though I would never have described him as particularly spiritual, at least the way we use that word

today. We had a conversation once about faith and vocation and the work my calling required of me, all the prayer and discernment and reading. He listened patiently, and then he said something I have never forgotten. He said: "You know, faith just hasn't been that hard for me. I grew up in a believing family. We went to church every Sunday. I understood that part of my responsibility was to raise up Christians, and I just did it naturally. I never thought of it as something difficult or odd."

Two completely different generations. Two completely different worlds. He inherited a grammar of faith so deep it felt like breathing. Many of us are working much harder to recover something we were told we could do without. That recovery is part of what brings us here.

I want to talk about vocation, because it is the heart of what this order is and why it matters that we take it seriously.

In the investiture service, the candidate stands before God and the assembly and receives the cross. The gesture is ancient. The language surrounding it reaches back through centuries of refounding and renewal, each generation of writers deliberately retrieving the vocabulary of those who came before, because the words themselves carry something irreplaceable. I have looked at the archives. The people who wrote and rewrote our investiture service were doing something intentional. They were reaching back. They were saying: this language belongs to us, and we belong to it. To wear this cross in public is to make a claim about one's life. It is to say: I have been called. I have agreed to a rule. I am less free than I was yesterday.

That last phrase will surprise anyone who has absorbed the ambient assumptions of our culture, which treats every award as a trophy, every recognition as a credential to display, and every advancement as an expansion of personal liberty. The Order of St John moves in the opposite direction entirely. The highest honor in the order is membership itself, the initial invitation to join a particular kind of spiritual life. To receive a service medal, or to be invested as a Knight or Dame, is to receive a recognition of a life already lived, yes, but also to accept a deeper constraint upon that life. You are now a public example of what you have said you believe. The trophy stays on the shelf. The cross goes on your chest. And by the way, I am genuinely against giving everyone a trophy. A service

medal is a recognition of who you have become in our midst, and that is a completely different thing.

I also want to be clear about something: we are a church. We are an order with a dean, a sub-prelate, a rule of life, and a church service at our center. We are an Anglican Christian order that extends a generous invitation to people of other traditions and other faiths. That generosity is real and it is beautiful. But generosity is different from vagueness. We are generous precisely because we know who we are. We are a Christian order that allows others in, and the cross we offer is the same cross that has been offered from the beginning.

The Christian grammar underneath all of this is the grammar of vocation. Before the Reformation, vocation was monastic language. The founding documents of this order, particularly the Papal Bull of 1113, make that plain: poverty, chastity, obedience, and service to the sick and the poor. That was a monastic rule, and it carried a monastic understanding of what it meant to be called. Within a few centuries the order had grown, defending pilgrims of different faiths, operating medical centers open to all, and expanding its sense of mission. Then the order was refounded by Queen Victoria, with a name recognizing its ancient lineage: The Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem. The vocation was named again: care for the sick and the poor of all faiths. And at that moment, the virtues were joined to it: courage, honor, justice, and courtesy. The language evolved, as language does, but the spine remained the same. First vocation is to God. Every other vocation is downstream from that one.

The Reformation rightly extended vocation into the world of ordinary labor, recognizing that kings and physicians and farmers served God in their callings as truly as any religious. The Protestant reformers needed kings and queens on their side, and they wanted to show that what those leaders were doing for the sake of reform was genuinely God's work. Yet something was also lost in that extension. By our own century, vocation in the West has collapsed almost entirely into occupation. 'My vocation is medicine.' 'My vocation is law.' For Christians, this collapse is catastrophic, because it displaces the one who calls and names before we are born.

The scriptures show us this consistently. Abraham and Sarah are renamed and sent. They bring no proposal for a journey to the wilderness. God places it on their hearts and they go. The disciples are called to follow before they are commissioned to proclaim. The 70 whom Jesus sends out in Luke echo the 70 whom Moses appoints: the pattern of call and commission runs through the whole of salvation history like a river. Pentecost itself, read through the lens of Babel, is God's great act of sending. Our Jewish brothers and sisters read Babel as

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the failure to go and bless the nations, the sin of centralizing what was given for dispersal. Pentecost from that lens forward is a new Babel, a reversal. A few frightened people in an upper room are filled and flung outward, just as Abraham was, just as Moses was, just as the disciples were. God calls. God sends. The called one goes bearing the tongue of the one who sent them.

That last image deserves to be held. The Latin *vocare*, from which we draw vocation, describes precisely this: to go on behalf of the one who has called you, to speak with the voice of the one who sent you. When an ambassador addressed a foreign king on behalf of his sovereign, he spoke as if the two sovereigns spoke together. When Paul stood before kings, the early church understood that Jesus was standing before kings. This is the different weight that Christian vocation bears by comparison with the secular understanding of career. A career advances. A vocation is given. A career builds. A vocation is inhabited.

Baptism makes this concrete. In the Anglican tradition, baptism is the outward sign of what God has already done for you. It is the sacramental seal of a prior call. Before you knew to ask, God named you. The investiture service stands in this same stream. It is a church service. That is the point of naming it a church service rather than a ceremony or a program. The language of the investiture, retrieved deliberately from its predecessors, is the language of divine call, monastic rule, and Christian service. You stand before God and before this community and you agree to a rule of life. Do I live my own rule perfectly? No; yet, the rule is still the rule, and God's grace is precisely what makes it possible to keep reaching toward it.

That is the whole of what I mean when I say I need a rule of life: it is the structure inside which grace can do its work.

This is what younger people are looking for, by the way. They are weary of institutions that do good work while treating their founding convictions as ornamental. They want to see people who say that something matters actually live as though it matters. To stand in the investiture and take a vow before God is to make a claim that can be seen and tested and held to account. The cross is outwardly visible precisely because the life it represents is meant to be outwardly visible.

The writer to the Hebrews says that God loves the lips that praise God's name, and that God loves those who share what they have and do good works (13:15). Praise, generosity, and service: these three together describe the shape of the vocation this order has carried since its founding. The cross worn by the member is the same cross worn by those who served the sick pilgrims in Jerusalem, who operated hospitals and defended the poor across centuries, who understood their lives as given over to a rule larger than personal preference or cultural comfort.

My father-in-law didn't need to think very hard about any of this. It was the air he breathed. For most of us, the work is more deliberate. We stand in the investiture and receive the cross, and we choose to let it constrain us, to let it cost us something, to let it mean what it has always meant. We are less free than we were. That is the point. That is the gift.

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