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Sovereign Council Meeting OSJ Headquarters, Malta, April, 2013
Next - March 19-22, 2015
Greetings from the Lt. Grand Master

Excellencies, Brothers and Sisters in St. John.

This, our second edition of the International Herald, provide an important venue to continue to share information about our mission with all members of the Order.

However, it is essential that all of our Grand Priors/Priors make a strong effort to keep the International Herald going by forwarding their contributions about their philanthropic achievements, upcoming events, investitures, and historical accounts of their Grand Priories/Priories. These contributions are essential to make our International Herald an effective instrument of communication for our International Order.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our Sisters and Brothers who co-operated so well in providing the articles that were published in our last edition of the International Herald, and our Editors for their efforts in making our last issue informative and comprehensive.

As we move into the Christmas season, and the New Year, we are aware that Christmas is a feast of personal and spiritual renewal. The New Year is also a time when we leave part of our personal history behind and move forward by making personal changes that will better our families and communities. Clearly our motto “pro fide-pro utilete hominum” must always be our inspiration to improve the lives of others in need. We must never lose sight of this, the dedication of our Order to humanity.

In March 2015, we will have our bi-annual meeting of the Sovereign Council in Malta.

It is my hope that all Grand Priories, Priories, and Commandaries will be represented. Important decisions will be taken at that meeting that will affect the ongoing extension of the Order, and all members are invited to attend.

It is now a priority to rejuvenate the spirit of the Order in our leadership and membership and incorporate the spirit of our motto into the ongoing and fast moving societal changes in the world at large. We have to be Knights in our contemporary world to remain relevant. Christian values in our modern world have dropped radically in recent generations.

The never before known personal wealth and lack of social discipline are pulling us deeper into a state of indifference and disregard for the needs of others. Many people in the world are living in extreme poverty and must be done, and yet there is a general lack of courage to do what is necessary to make a difference for those in need.

We together, working within the Order of St. John of Jerusalem Hospitallers, is the important link that is necessary to maintain the traditional Christian values. We will have to live our Christian values in order to pass them on to the next generation. We will only manage to accomplish in a spirit of prayer and a concern for our fellow men. Only then will our Order remain meaningful and relevant.

Together we all have to make an effort to ensure that all our Sisters and Brothers function properly in the spirit of Christ and dedicate our efforts selflessly toward the needs of others.

May the Order never project the image of personal power but rather proclaim our noble purpose to serve the sick and the poor.

May I wish you and your loved ones a joyful and blessed Christmas and a happy New Year with good health.

God bless you all.

Yours in Christ and St. John,

Michel Bohé GCSJ
Lt. Grand Master.
Investiture Low Countries 2014:

June 29th 2014: Feast of Saint John Baptist in Bruges: Special Chapter of the Priory of the Low Countries

This article is meant as a response to one of the aims of “The International Herald”, put forward in the Spring 2014 edition by Dr. Vincent R. Bonagura, Grand Councillor G.C.S.J.: “We will feature (3) special events that have occurred since the last issue of The International Herald.”

The Special Chapter of the Priory of the Low Countries on Sunday 29th of June 2014 in Bruges (Belgium) may indeed be labeled as “a special event”! The history of the Priory started in 1967, when the Flemish Commandery was founded. Its statutes were published in the Belgian Statute Book on June 22nd. The Commandery celebrated its first Feast of Saint John the Baptist in the abbey of Saint Trudo in Male, near Bruges. One year later, in 1968, The Priory of The Low Countries was founded during the Chapter of The Grand Priory Europe at Weitenburg, with Commander A. G. Homblé as its first Bailiff-Prior. Nowadays the Grand Priory of The Low Countries consists of the Prioratus Flandriae and the Priory of The Low Countries which in its turn comprises five Commanderies: Antwerp, Brabant, Flanders, Slype-Caestre and Loon. Nowadays the Priory has no less than 146 members!

Prior to the Special Chapter, a solemn Vigil of the Knights had been organized on Wednesday 25th of June in the beautiful chapel of the medieval Court of Bladelin in the same city. During this vigil the Knights prayed together with the future Knights and confirmed their christening promises.

On Sunday, the weather didn’t seem to be quite aware of the great meeting that was taking place in Bruges, as heavy rain was pouring down on the city in the morning. Inside the Crown Plaza Hotel, however, an ever growing number of ladies and gentlemen enjoyed the morning coffee or tea and the delicious butter biscuits. At 9.15 the Knights were invited to come together in the crypt under the hotel. This crypt was part of the medieval Church of Saint Donatus, in which the Flemish Earl Charles the Good had been murdered in 1127. The church was destroyed during the French Revolution, but the crypt was turned into a very nice meeting place a few decades ago.

Prior to the Special Chapter, a solemn Vigil of the Knights had been organized on Wednesday 25th of June in the beautiful chapel of the medieval Court of Bladelin in the same city. During this vigil the Knights prayed together with the future Knights and confirmed their christening promises.

The Special Chapter was opened by Henri Schilz, Commander of Slype-Caestre. He welcomed Lieutenant-Grandmaster Michel Bohé, Grand Commander Paul Borg, the Prior of the Low Countries Stefaan Vandendriessche and all other Brothers and Sisters of the Low Countries and the other Priories.

The Reverend Hans Vanackere, prelate of the Priory of The Low Countries, commemorated an prayed for the members of the
Priory who had deceased since the previous Chapter. He also commemorated the holy figure of Saint John the Baptist.

After that, four new aspirants confirmed their loyalty to the order, their promise to render service to the poor and distressed and their determination to defend the Christian Faith. This implies a serious engagement and the audience was asked to meditate a few minutes on this challenge, before imploring God’s blessing over the aspirants and the new knights.

The four aspirants then each repeated the promise separately and subscribed it: Sebastiaan Van Steenberge and Dominic Verhoeven of the Antwerp Commandery; Marcel Billen of the Brabant Commandery and Dominiek Blommaert of the Slype-Caestre Commandery.

After that, the new knights each pronounced their solemn promise and subscribed it: Alain Pels of the Antwerp Commandery; Carlo De Vos and Jos Goffin of the Brabant Commandery; Jean Charles Bastiaens, Jan Cordonnier, Gilbert De Neve and Theo Meuleman of the Slype-Caestre Commandery and Eddy De Pandelaere and Werner De Pelseneer of the Flanders Commandery.

The new aspirants and knights were welcomed with a cordial applause. Then everybody left the hotel and followed the harmony of the College of Saint Leo in Bruges in a procession which took them to the impressive baroque church of Saint Walburga, built by the Jesuits in the seventeenth century.
Almost a hundred knights entered the church in their beautiful red capes, followed by their numerous relatives and friends, while festive tunes were being played on the organ. The Mass itself was conducted by the Reverend Hans Vanackere, assisted by the Reverend Patrick Degrieck, chaplain of the Slype-Caestre Commandery and Reverend Robert Bollen. The hymns were sung by the magnificent Ghent Madrigal Choir, conducted by Johan Duijck.


In his sermon, Reverend Hans Vanackere commemorated Saint John the Baptist and focused on his importance as a source of inspiration for all the knights of the order named after him. The new knights then received their cross and their coat and they vowed their oath of loyalty, before being knighted. They each did so separately and were then congratulated and welcomed by his Excellency Lieutenant Grand Master, Michel Bohé OSJ.

The investigation ceremony was solemnly concluded with the Prayer of the Knight. Then God let His sun shine brightly over the older and younger knights, the aspirants and all their proud and happy relatives and friends.

A nice reception and a delicious dinner in the hotel terminated this glorious Special Chapter in Bruges!

The organizing Commandery of Slype-Caestre and Paul Borg, Grand Commander.

Report by Frank Demuynck CJSJ and Flor Will

OSJ New York Autumn Gala

On Friday night, November 21, the New York Commandery of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem “went to the dogs” at the Yale Club for their Autumn Gala in support of the Guide Dog Foundation (GDF) for the Blind. The GDF, founded in 1946 to provide service animals for wounded WWII military veterans, continues its commitment to veterans and civilians alike. Based in Smithtown on Long Island, the GDF not only raises, trains and monitors guide dogs, it does so without charging its human graduates. The cost to train, house, and feed, puppies for ultimate use as guide dogs, and to educate their blind companions costs in excess of $50,000 to provide a single dog to a blind individual.

Several Guide Dog Foundation “human graduates” were in attendance with their guide dogs. In addition the GDF provided four puppies in training for view at the Gala. The puppies were quite a sight on the dance floor, see pictures below, and the Gala guests were clearly delighted to pet and play with some of these adorable puppies who will be future service dogs. Some of the guests committed to become puppy trainers in a program, which the GDF organizes and administrates, where individuals and
families who raise a dog for a year in preparation for a guide dog’s entry into an advanced training with a blind individual.  

Celeste Lopes, Esq., a “human graduate” of the Guide Dog Foundation, as well as a Member of the GDF Board and a practicing attorney, addressed the Gala attendees and explained how the GDF changed her life. She has had six guide dogs in service over her lifetime and credits them for having given her the independence she needed to enter the legal profession. She reminded the audience that there remain challenges with the public’s perception of the importance of guide dogs to blind persons and the acceptance of guide dogs in public transportation, restaurants and taxis.

The evening continued with a live auction under the gavel of Amy Epstein. Donors included Marriott International, Turkish Airlines, Brussels Airlines, Kempinski Budapest, Schloss Leopoldskron Salzburg, Prior Ann and Chevalier William van Ness, and Mr Joseph and Dame Lea Conetta. The Auction raised a record amount for the Order of St. John New York Commandery the proceeds of which will go in full, directly to the GDF. In total, the Gala raised $74,000 for the GDF.

Mother Cecily Broderick of St. John’s Episcopal Hospital which received the Sandy International Funds made available from the OSJ International Fund, seated with Dame Claire Burke, Vice Commander OSJNY

Disc Jocky Steve Cello made certain that the evening’s canine theme was maintained by interspersing such tunes as “Who Let the Dogs Out” among others and the Gala attendees danced with a few of the guide dogs who appeared to have enjoyed themselves completely.
The Commandery of New York, The Americas Priory continues on with the long tradition of The Order of St John of Jerusalem, Knights Hospitaller, our a 901 year old Order of chivalry presently based on the islands of Malta, by providing support for those in need in New York and New Jersey. “Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum”, For Faith and Service to Mankind.

Submitted by Chevalier JJ Doran, KSJ

OSJ Florida A Knight In Vienna

Honoring Henrietta, Countess De Hoernle's 102nd Birthday

On Tuesday, October 7, 2014, The OSJ Florida Commandery, The Americas Priory, hosted a Viennese concert for Countess de Hoernle's 102nd Birthday. The event drew more than 600 attendees who sang "Happy Birthday" and gave the Lynn University Philharmonic a standing ovation.

OSJ Members attending: Top Row - James Ballerano, Robert Moore, James Gavrilos, James Maughan, Duncan Hurd (Commander West Indies), Karen Willis, Donna Hearon. Front Row - Jan Jessup, Alyce Erickson, Mary Csar, Isabelle Paul, Marta Rendon, Irene Casey, Betty Kelly

The Countess was unable to attend. But a life-size “likeness“ of the Countess, and her daughter who came in from York, Penn., stood in for the countess at the fundraiser for local charities in the Wold Performing Arts Center at Lynn University. Carol Wagman told the crowd her mother had a minor stroke and had stayed home on doctors' orders. But she still gave Wagman explicit instructions on what to say at the birthday gala.

By late last week, the well-known philanthropist was "feeling much better and sounds like herself," said Commander Isabelle Paul, of the Order of St. John Florida Commandery, which

sponsored the event and previous de Hoernle birthday parties. Countess De Hoernle is a member and patron of the Americas Priory. "She was thrilled with all the reports and phone calls, and she was very sorry she couldn't be there and she is feeling better," said Commander Paul.

De Hoernle was lauded for setting the bar for giving, and her name and her late husband's are on about 100 buildings, parks and facilities. "She set an example for philanthropy that is unsurpassed," said Dame Mary Csar, event co-chairperson with Commander Paul and Chevalier James Ballerano Jr.

Commander Isabelle Paul and Carol Wagman with the likeness of the Countess de Hoernle

Chevalier Jon Robertson, Dean, Lynn Conservatory of Music, and the Lynn University Philharmonic Orchestra

The Lynn University Orchestra provided the music and the entertainment venue. The program ranged from Mozart, Brahms, Beethoven and Strauss to Rodgers and Hammerstein's "The Sound of Music," the countess' favorite music. "We are honored to
perform for you tonight all the composers who lived in Vienna," Robertson announced from the podium. Chevalier Ballerano as master of ceremonies paid tribute to Christine E. Lynn, the presenting benefactor with Dame Jane Bennett, and Elaine Johnson Wold, the honorary chairwoman whose name is on the performing arts center with her late husband Keith. This was the largest crowd that ever attended the Countess' birthday party, he announced.

Guests were asked to stay to sample the birthday cake with a real crown and a toast after the concert.

On September 7, 2014, the Commandery of St. Francis held the 5th annual Wounded Veterans Polo Benefit, raising funds for rehabilitation programs serving combat-injured veterans in the San Francisco Bay area. Three worthwhile programs had been selected for financial support:

1. Pathway Home, a 3-month residential course treating Post Traumatic Stress Disease cases;
2. the Bay Area Association of Disabled Sailors, getting veterans sailing in handicap-modified sailing dinghies on the San Francisco Bay;
3. Community Action North Bay providing transitional housing and resettlement assistance for veterans in need.

The latter two programs are notably run by Knights and Dames of the Commandery who donate their time, resources and energy to directly supporting the veterans.

Proceeds will go to local charities that apply to St. John's for grants, such as Boca Helping Hands, HomeSafe, Gulfstream Goodwill Industries and Family Promise, Commander Paul said.

Submitted by Commander Isabelle Paul, DGSJ and Dame Peggy Donovan, CGSJ

Polo in the Wine Country

The day began with the posting of the Colors, the Stars and Stripes and the Order banner, by a US Army reserve Color Guard. The tournament consisted of two games, for which all four teams had found "sponsors" whose financial contribution entitled them to decide their team name and logo. Following a World War II theme the first ball was thrown in from an Army jeep by

Presenting the Colors
Commander Richard Keith KGSJ, himself a veteran of the war in the Pacific. Among the players Chevalier Paul Griffin KSJ led the winning team to a 7-6 victory.

Colonel John Roush, KCSJ

The second game was thrown in by Guest of Honor Colonel John Roush, KCSJ, a veteran of the Normandy campaign. The fast and furious game was closely won by a team named the Nicasio Nights.

During the day a gourmet lunch was served to over 250 guests, wine tasting was offered by six California wineries, a silent auction and an appeal raised money for the cause, and the crowd was entertained by a 1940's fashion show followed by a dancing display by models and dancers from San Francisco. The event concluded with the retiring of the Colors and the playing of "Taps" by a lone bugler.

The Decades of Fashion Dance Company

Organizing an event on this scale consumes a lot of volunteer time and effort in planning and execution. To the great credit of Commandery members it came off flawlessly and was greatly enjoyed by all. As a result of the event the Commandery was able to donate $50,000 among the three selected beneficiaries.

Chevalier Paul Griffin KSJ

Event Photos by ChristineGeorge.com

Submitted by Chevalier Stephen M. Pendas, KSJ

Report Summer Conference

Astrophysicist Prof Chris Christoffel Waelkens

WONDER is after all still a WONDER?
Knokke Belgium, July 18th 2014

For the fourth year in a row, the Working Group 'Faith and Meaning', belonging to OSJ Commandery of Flanders, organized in the Dominican Church in Knokke, two summer conferences. During the first lecture on July 18th 2014, astrophysicist Christoffel Waelkens, professor at the Catholic University of Leuven, spoke about the “big bang”, the evolution of the universe, planetary systems, and possible life in the universe. His scientific explanation alternated with considerations of a faithful scientist, as he himself qualifies. He does not shy away from displaying his personal views, but he takes care not to mix faith and science.

Astronomy today aims to understand the universe in evolution, and our place in it: a story of wonder about what exists and about what we can know.
Since the 1960s, the so-called big bang theory is completely accepted by science, and today it is the paradigm in which cosmic evolution is founded. This theory explains fundamental data and delivers a fertile framework for further research. Its consequence is that everything had a beginning, about 14 billion years ago, and that the universe is in permanent expansion. The theory of multiple big bangs resulting in several universes (multi versa by Stephen Hawking) is, according to the speaker, hypothetical. He prefers the physical cosmology theory that uses concrete experimental scientific methods, instead of hypothetical theories, which he compares to “the shadow images of a real world, in the cave of Plato”.

Professor Christoffel Waelkens

The demand to determine if there is life elsewhere in the universe is for now, hypothetical. Most planets do not possess the properties necessary for life: the presence of water, appropriate temperature to sustain life, the presence of oxygen, and low frequency of asteroid impacts of collisions. Recently, some planets similar to our earth are thought to exist, although life on other planets has not yet been identified. For this reason, we can speak of “our rare earth”, which seems to be an exception, maybe unique in the universe. However, there are several billions of planets thought to exist in the universe, thus we should not rule out the possibility that there are planets that can support life as we know it.

We as “small human beings”, “positioned on a tiny observation post in the universe”, are not able to fully conceive the big picture. This is, among others, is possible because of the universality of natural law, which in itself is not easily evident. That the laws of nature everywhere in the universe are identical is a basic setting that has been confirmed time and again in all the observations of the cosmic phenomena. The assumption that gravity, discovered by Sir Isaac Newton, had a universal character, suggesting that there are also other laws of physics prevailing on earth and in the universe that are yet to be discovered.

Throughout the entire lecture, the central theme emphasized words such as: "strange, wonder, wonderful and emerging”. This may sound odd from the mouth of a serious scientist however the speaker called for some modesty, because scientifically, we cannot, nor shall we be able to fathom everything. Notwithstanding, science has made huge progress in the last century and continues to make important discoveries in an ever accelerating pace, it has no limitations. After each scientific discovery, there are always new questions to be answered.

The speaker considers both Science and God’s Faith as a mystery. Scientists treat each as totally different domains that will never give a conclusive answer on all questions. We conclude with a typical quote of the speaker: When I say ' God exists ', that is for me a meaningful affirmation. But at the same time, a double question: ' Who is God? ' (as a believer), and ' What is existence? ' (as a scientist). On either question, I will never be able to formulate a conclusive answer. That's why I keep on as faithful human being and as a scientist.

Etienne Leirman
Commander OSJ Flanders
Prioraat van de Lage Landen

Bulletin Board

Upcoming Events

• Sovereign Council Meeting - Mar. 21, 2015