



**Sovereign Order of St John of Jerusalem,
Knights Hospitaller**

Grand Priory of the Americas

Notes on the Sovereign Order

June, 2015

Editors: Prior Janet L. Miller, DJSJ (Cleveland)

Chevalier Ian Reid, KCJSJ, MMSJ (Vancouver)

Past Commander Christopher J. Worrall, KJSJ (St Joseph)

Who We Are

The Sovereign Order of St John is an ecumenical international Christian organisation with over 900 years of history. It is directly descended from the close collaboration of crusader knights with the Hospitaller activities of the hospice founded by Brother Gerard in the 11th century and subsequently formalized by the merchants of Amalfi for pilgrims in Jerusalem.

The collaboration was recognized as an Order of Chivalry by Pascal II in a Papal Bull dated February 15, 1113. There are 850 members as at February, 2015.

Motto

Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum (For Faith, For Service to Humanity)

1: GENERAL

Bringing in suitable new Members is everyone's personal responsibility.

The editors would hope that these Background notes are not welcomed with respect and then forgotten with haste. To the contrary, we are trying to make them “living” guidelines that change, develop and adjust to our collective experiences. We ask that readers send their suggestions for improvement, new questions or better answers to the Administrator at the Grand Priory at registrar@sosjinternational.org using the topic Recruiting Guidelines.

1.1 Basics

People recruit people so each potential Aspirant needs to be approached in a way that is most suited for their interests. The recruiting Dame or Knight will be approaching them from some sort of relationship, usually as friend, associate, colleague or family member and so is in the best position to judge how to do it. The process of encouraging or persuading potential Aspirants to join the Order is almost universally a one to one relationship process. This means the Knight or Dame:

- Identifies friends, family or associates who might enjoy the Order's mix of tradition, service and fun.
- Discusses the possibility with them to establish interest. Typically there are several questions at this stage.
- Obtains approval from the Recruiting Chair or such other process used by the Commandery. Typically a resume is required at this stage, even if only as a summary, along with specifics on the potential aspirant's charitable efforts and contributions.
- Once approval is obtained, converts interest to commitment.

1.2 Objectives

In no particular order, prospective Aspirants should be:

- Highly accomplished individuals of great integrity.
- Able to show a record of philanthropy in terms of time, talent or treasure.
- Leaders in their profession or community.
- Viewed as comfortably able to work with the members of the Commandery.
- Christian of at least age 23. Individual Commanderies may require higher age qualifications. These Guidelines do not address the special cases of the Demoiselle and Squire provisions for those 18-23 years old. See the Order's Rules. Note that it is usually harder to recruit Aspirants younger than 50 because it is early in their professional and family lives to have much time available but there are many individual exceptions. Nevertheless, the Order must always try for new aspirants who are younger than our average.
- Reasonably established in their community so they can support their membership in the Order. Clergy are an exception as their contributions are spiritual and their resources generally limited.

1.3 Reasons for Joining

One of the larger Commanderies recently surveyed their members.

The reasons people joined were:

- Everyone said they gave joining consideration because of the way they were approached and especially by whom they were approached.
- An overwhelming majority consider it an honor to have been chosen to be a member of the Order.

- They knew and admired/respected people in the Order.
- They believed in the Mission.
- They believed in the Commandery's particular charitable aims.
- They liked the ecumenical Christian focus of the Order.
- They saw it as an opportunity to network with like-minded individuals i.e. they liked the friends and social life associated with the Order.
- Not specified but likely is that the unique combination of tradition and service was a factor.

The Dame or Knight may discuss all of the above or simply focus on the elements that seem suitable for the individual being approached.

1.4 History Talking Points

The history is a great story that we likely don't tell often enough. Talking points include:

- Brother Gerard led the original hospice in Jerusalem for pilgrims beginning in the 11th century. The survival rate in this hospice was much better than was usual because of his belief in the value of ventilation, and separate beds and dishes.
- It was a rough neighborhood during the Crusades so the Order became an Order militant but never forgot building and running hospices. The Order has now returned to its original roots in aid for the sick and poor.
- Driven out of Palestine and Rhodes by the Arabs and Turks respectively; the Knights were given the island of Malta by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V for the price of a falcon as an annual gift. Hence the Humphrey Bogart movie "the Maltese Falcon".

- The Siege of Malta in 1565 where 500 Knights and 6000 men at arms withstood 40,000 Ottoman Turks. Combined with the naval Battle of Lepanto in 1572, Turkish expansion in the Mediterranean west of Greece was permanently stopped. The defense was led by the Grand Master of the Order, Jean de Valette, hence today's Valletta, the capital of Malta.
- The Order was expelled from Malta in 1798 by Napoleon leading to relocation across Europe and separation into different Orders, particularly the Russian Order from whom the Sovereign Order of St John descends and various European Orders. The Sovereign Order of St John saved the relics and transferred them to Russia to protect the direct line.
- From the 1960's on – slow restoration of growth accelerating in the 1980's with dynamic leadership in North America. Reunification between related Orders in Europe, the United Kingdom and the Americas to begin restoring unity. Increased focus on “helping the sick and poor.”

1.5 Commitment

The most challenging step is moving from interest to commitment to join. Points to note:

- While the initial approach can be easy, recruiting frequently extends for years.
- The story of the Order should get told in more depth, whether about good works, history or social life. Occasionally Aspirants point out “nobody told me about robes”. We don't want too many surprises of this variety.

- One common mistake at this stage is to rely on casual conversations at non Order events. Joining the Order is a serious business that should be treated seriously. It is more effective to meet with the specific purpose of discussing the Order whether by a simple coffee together or a meal although this not preclude subsequent casual conversations.
- Prospective Aspirants often say they don't have the time which is hardly a surprise given the quality of people we are after to join the Order. Sometimes this is just a polite no but it is often true. It may help to point out that only the Investiture is "mandatory" and that one need attend only a few other events . We do expect participation in the life of the Order through committee work, special events or individual initiatives but the pace of the effort is up to the member as is the timing of starting to participate. It is an honor to be asked but we do realize that people have a broader life. The Dame or Knight involved must use their own judgement as to how often to keep in contact but keep in contact we must. Persistence wins so long as it is not "in your face".
- Prospective aspirants are likely to have questions. The later sections have the most common questions with possible answers. Please let us know if you encounter other questions or better answers so others can benefit. E-mails to registrar@sosjinternational.org topic Recruiting Notes will get to the editors.
- The most common question is "what will be asked of me". A summary of activities or committees can help with a counter question along the lines of "how do you think you could help?" It is better to have thought out the answers in advance of getting the question while being

prepared to adapt them to reflect any indicated preferences.

- The Order Website is at www.sosjinternational.org. Giving the address to prospective aspirants will save a Google search amongst the various Orders of St John. The website is expected to be updated soon. There is a very good 17 minute video on the site that is designed to help in attracting potential Aspirants.
- Finally, the “ask”. The Dame or Knight bringing in the prospective Aspirant judges the right time to ask whether the prospective aspirant wishes to proceed. If so, proceed with the process. If not, find out whether it is another “not at this time” or a no and act accordingly. Finally asking the prospective Aspirant to commit can be difficult, especially since we are nearly always asking friends or associates. But there is no success without the “ask.”

The remaining sections of these notes provide common questions and possible answers.

2: WHO WE ARE

2.1 What does the Order do?

We help the “Lord’s sick and poor” as per the mission statement. We continue in a 900 year tradition with our structure. The result is an organisation that serves others while enjoying remarkable friendship amongst ourselves. Section 2.3 has specifics as to why people join and what they get out of the Order. Sample accomplishments include:

- Funded, designed and built a 14 bed hospice (Vancouver).
- Funded affordable housing for developmentally disabled adults (St Joseph's).
- Built and provided books for an inner city school library (Cleveland).
- Funded furniture for homeless housing project (Victoria).
- Supported an Alzheimer respite centre for low income families (St Joseph).
- Support of Middle East Christians under stress from local developments (Brittany).

These are but a few examples from a list that would require many pages.

2.2 Tradition – what use is 900 years of tradition?

Through shared experience, tradition helps bind people together and develop an emotional commitment to the organization. There is always a strong base in tradition in ancient organisations that have survived to this day like the Roman Catholic Church or the merely old such as the British Royal Navy or the US Marine Corps. Tradition helps maintain organizations in bad times through the commitment of individuals and grow them in good times by instilling the values and culture in newcomers.

Of course, successful organizations adapt operational policies to the events of the day else they fail. But tradition provides the values that give context to the operational changes.

Finally, for those with an interest, it's fun.

2.3 There's too much formality!

Tradition thrives on formality although in more limited doses as society has evolved over the last 50 years. Formality for the Order is limited to the formal events, particularly the Investiture and it is otherwise on a first name basis. “No sir” or “Yes sir” are not heard within the Order. However, for formal events, the formality gives structure to the tradition.

2.4 What is the difference between the Order and service clubs such as the Rotary?

Both types of groups can do great work in their chosen areas. The difference lies in governance and tradition.

The Order is run through a structure derived from military organization with a hierarchy, ranks and the like which comes directly from our history. In practice, as a volunteer organization, the governance bears only a formal resemblance to military hierarchy. Nevertheless, the Order is more hierarchical than service clubs and does maintain ranks, medals and formal dress characteristics. The Order also has 900 years of tradition behind it as discussed.

Less distinctive differences include:

- The Order has a very formal and moving Investiture Service for an inauguration ceremony.
- The Order is Christian and cannot be otherwise given the 900 years of history.
- The Order concentrates on each individual's integrity, success and commitment to helping the “sick and the poor”.
- The Order is growing; most service clubs are struggling.

2.5 I can't give large donations. Is there room for me?

Yes. Membership is about people of accomplishment and integrity. This does not necessarily mean great wealth. Clergy, social entrepreneurs and staff from the non-profit sector may not be able to write material checks but still may make great contributions to “helping the sick and the poor” through their experience, contacts and efforts. The Order is made of people willing to contribute time, talent or treasure. Not many can do all three.

2.6 Why so many Ranks and Titles?

Part of the traditions include ranks and titles stemming back to the time when the Order was made up of Knights militant and thus have been preserved although modified by time and evolving language.

In ascending order, the Order has three ranks, Knight or Dame of Honour, Grace and Justice with the last two having senior sub ranks as in “Dame Commander of Grace”. Aspirants join the Order at the rank of Honour. All promotions are based on effort in contributing to the Order's activities. There are also minimum time requirements to be met. A minimum of three years must pass from becoming a Dame or Knight of Honour before becoming “of Grace” and at least two years for each promotion to higher rank or Commander title. The later promotions require increasing effort within the Order. Few are promoted on each of the minimum anniversary dates. There are additional titles for those in the senior positions but they are not very useful in discussing matters with a prospective Aspirant. See the Rules of the Order.

The “Commander” designation can be confusing as it is used both as a position for the person in charge of a Commandery and as a sub rank as noted above. Traditions are not always administratively elegant.

2.7 How is the Sovereign Order different from other Orders of St John?

We should never run down our “cousins.” Most do good work and some have made great contributions such as the St Johns Ambulance. Nearly all have the same history we have until the 1798 exile of the Order from Malta. In fact, five of them and the Sovereign Order formally recognize each other.

Subsequent histories vary considerably.

- We have a strong claim to being the original organization, both through the name and the vagaries of possession of the relics.
- We have a Royal Charter from the Queen of the United Kingdom.
- We are ecumenical and have been in practical terms since the arrival in Russia.
- We are not related to any specific church.
- We put great emphasis on helping the “sick and the poor.”

We have been working to bring together as many of the Orders that share our history as possible. The Reunification of the Sovereign Order of the Hospital Order of St John of Jerusalem (Continental Europe) with the Sovereign Order of St John of Jerusalem, Knights Hospitaller (Americas and UK) in 2010 is a good example. At any given time there are on-going discussions with other groups.

3: HOW WE DO THINGS

3.1 What am I committing to?

Membership is in an ecumenical Christian international organization. Activities include those that are unusual such as the Marshal who is responsible for ceremonies or the Conservator for preserving traditions and history. We also have roles that are more usual in a non-profit organisation such as fund raising, volunteer activities, events, finance and so forth. We do expect members to participate in at least one area but the scope of the contribution is up to the member.

3.2 How long is my membership?

Membership is for life, short of problems such as fraud, personal bankruptcy etc. Failure to pay annual oblations does result in members being “not in good standing” which has the effect of losing all rights of membership.

3.3 What is the money spent on?

The Aspirants’ oblations cover the cost of robes, medals and the like as well as the first year of the annual oblations. Other than that, all money is spent on charity except part time clerical administration where volumes require, communications such as Newsletters and the usual minor office expenses. In January 2015, there are only three offices, the International Office, the European and UK office and the office of the largest Commandery. No member of the Order anywhere receives compensation for their services. Expenses for travel on Order business are provided for in a very limited way.

3.4 What language is used?

English is the international working language of the Order and is used by all Commanderies where English is the official language of the area.

4: SIZE

4.1 Why aren't there more members?

First, remember that membership in the Order is a rather exclusive honour. The Order almost disappeared after the collapse of the Tsarist regime in 1917. The European priories were to a large extent orphaned while North America had not been a significant contributor, although both kept going and provided themselves with a workable “King Peter” Constitution 1962 as approved by the King of Yugoslavia. In the 1980's, North America received new strong leadership and began growing the Grand Priory of the Americas within the high standards of personal knowledge of the new members. This tends to be a slow process that leads to a strong organization. As at February 2015, the Grand Priory of the Americas is 60% of the total 850 members. The Order expects growth to accelerate over the next few years from three sources:

- Organic growth of existing Commanderies. The best examples are the St Henrik Priory in Finland has grown to 92 members from 60 in four years and Germany which is currently showing a similar growth rate.
- New Commanderies in both North America and Europe. Monaco and the Okanagan are the newest.
- Mergers with other Orders to help restore unity.

4.2 Why haven't I heard of the Order?

We are not large in any one area nor is it our intention to be so. The largest Commandery has 150 members. The “invitation only” nature, quality orientation and personal nature of the Order work against it being large in any one area. Notwithstanding that, individual Commanderies can have a real impact. One funded, designed and built a 14 bed hospice for \$5.3m. Others make material contributions to a wide variety of projects that are usually local but include African, Central America and Middle East projects.

4.3 Does the Order have any barriers to women or different ethnic groups?

Constitutional barriers that disadvantaged women were completely eliminated in 1998 with the result that women have filled many of the top positions in the Order including Commanders, Priors, Bailiffs and Petit Conseil members. There are no constitutional barriers to anyone since that day except the requirement to be Christian.

The Order has members from many ethnic groups but fewer than we would like. This came about because of the very personal nature of our recruiting. The builders of the Grand Priory of the Americas were male Caucasians who, like recruiting like, recruited other male Caucasians. Commanderies work very hard to correct this but our personal recruiting methods make it a slow process. However, there have been significant improvements over the last few years.

5: RELIGION, RITES AND ROBES

5.1 The Order is too Christian for me!

The Order does not demand adherence to any particular faith provided the prospective aspirant commits to being Christian. We are ecumenical within that. However, we have 900 years of history as a Christian Order, at least 600 of which was as a militant Order co-existing with the section of the Order that built and ran hospices. The commitment to Christianity is not going to go away any time in the foreseeable future any more than the B'nai B'rith is likely to be indifferent to religion. Only the formal Investiture is overtly religious in nature and that is traditional.

Note that helping the “Lord’s sick and poor” is for all people regardless of their religious beliefs.

5.2 Is the Order an extension of any particular church like the Knights of Columbus?

No. We are not related to any particular church.

5.3 Is there an expectation of engaged church activity by members?

No. The Order tends to its business and our members tend to theirs.

5.4 Are there any secret rites, handshakes, language and so on?

No.

5.5 Robes

Our striking robes are a part of the Investiture ceremony and are worn for it and directly related events. They are sometimes used at other church based events like funerals but otherwise are rarely required. Robes are traditional in design, wholly modern in their simplicity and stunning in their impact.

5.6 What is involved in the Investiture?

It is a formal and memorable event that is nearly always carried out in a church. Although it is quite structured, there is always a rehearsal to prepare Aspirants for their role in it.