

HOSPITALLER



The journal of the British Association of the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta

Spring 2020

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On meeting a saint
Keeping a pledge

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SPECIAL EDITION:
WOMEN OF THE ORDER

Sarah Macmillan

Founding member of the OMV (Order of Malta Volunteers), a member of the Lourdes Santuaire, currently British Association Council secretary and indefatigable volunteer at Order activities and events, including the soup kitchens, tea parties, Christmas concert, Lourdes.



Anne Jaffray

The oldest member: Anne Jaffray, who for many years fundraised for Order projects, has just turned 100!



Philippa Leslie

Communications professional who supports and presents the Order's works nationally and internationally and is a volunteer in Order local activities.



Patricia Talbot

No issue about significant women in the Order could be complete with mentioning Patricia Talbot who retired last year as Vice President.



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Caroline de la Force

Around all the activities of the British Association is the support of its indefatigable Membership Secretary, Caroline de la Force. She is the support factor that underpins them. Famously camera-shy, she remains the open door to providing help and assistance for the members right around the country. The Association has just celebrated her twenty-year anniversary with us, with appreciation, admiration and affection.



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Hospitalier is the journal of the British Association of the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta.

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From the President

This edition of Hospitaller is dedicated to the wonderful activities of the women who work in and with our Order. Our Grand Master, Fra' Giacomo Dalla Torre, is enthusiastic for this special edition to show their dedication, work and influence for good in all our activities. And Pope Francis, in his new year address, underlined the contribution of women to the work of the Church. "Every step forward for women is a step forward for humanity as a whole," he said, and later in the month, appointed an Italian lawyer, Dr Francesca Di Giovanni, as Under Secretary for Relations with States, in the Secretariat of State. On being interviewed for this unprecedented appointment, Dr Di Giovanni emphasised: "But the responsibility is connected to the job, rather than to the fact of being a woman." We will say the same: it is the ability that counts. And the women of the Order are achieving much.

You will read of the work of our Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, and in an interesting counter-balance, an interview with the British Ambassador to the Holy See. We also look at the inspiring works underway in the Lebanon and Russia, and pay tribute to those involved in Lourdes, from the medical care to the fundraising 'British shop'.

At the national level, it is noticeable that in our wonderful UK care homes, more than 80% of the 4500 employees are women, looking after 3200 residents, 70% of whom are also women. Around the country, our activities to help the homeless with our soup kitchens, our tea parties for the elderly lonely, our pilgrimages with our guests, our global fundraising and nascent prison ministry, all continue to expand, as well as do the many small kindnesses carried out everywhere, all the time, in the name of the Order – all these contribute to our traditional mission to help those in need.

Backing up all these activities are our splendid administrators back at base, whose efficiency and goodwill ensure streamlined support whenever required.

In all that we do, may our works continue to flourish.

RICHARD FITZALAN HOWARD
*President, British Association of the
Sovereign Order of Malta*



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Cover photo:
Our Lady of Philermos: the icon dates from the 11/12 century, with many subsequent copies, such as this one, having been created.

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A unique role

An interview with Sally Axworthy, UK Ambassador to the Holy See

Her Excellency Sally Axworthy has been Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Holy See since September 2016. Friendly and informal, the non Catholic mother of four, with a thirty year diplomatic career to her credit, has embraced her assignment with energy and enthusiasm. The unique role is to maintain and develop relations between the UK and the Holy See. The Ambassador: 'The work with the Holy See is unique, because we are not only dealing with a sovereign country, the Vatican City State, but also with a global faith - the Roman Catholic Church, with 1.3bn adherents including in the UK.'

Early on in her posting, she was interested to discover the important role women play in the Church and found that there are nearly twice as many religious sisters (800,000) as there are Catholic priests (around 400,000) – far more than religious brothers (55,000) – and they are doing some of the Church's most important work. 'If there's a global problem, you usually find the religious sisters there at the sharp ends, whether it's migrants and refugees, victims of sexual violence in conflict, or victims of human trafficking and modern slavery.' She notes that the Pope has a very clear

agenda for his papacy – he focuses on the poor and the marginalised – and explains that the Embassy reacts on the things in common, for example, climate change, slavery, persecution of Christians (an awareness campaign was launched in London and Rome), conflict resolution, women in leadership roles, the dialogue on the abolition of nuclear weapons.

Key events are jointly marked

There are also events that we jointly mark – for example, this year is the 850th anniversary of the assassination of Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral.

Through his Encyclical 'Laudato Si' Francis signals his recognition of and support for actions to alleviate climate change. In November, the UK will host in Glasgow the 26th Conference of the Parties, known as COP26, in partnership with Italy. It will be a vital international response to the climate emergency and how to tackle it on a global scale – the most important meeting on climate change issues since the 2015 Paris Agreement. The Embassy, the Holy See and the UK government are already well into their planning.

A key recent international event organised by the Embassy: the presence of the Prince of Wales at the canonisation of St John Henry Newman. 'This was a very personal intervention and he came as the most senior member of the royal family after the Queen and celebrated Newman as a great man, a great and gifted Briton. His attendance and touching speech was very good for UK Catholics, as it was inclusive.'

Another recent event which occupied the Embassy was the visit of the All-Party Parliamentary Group of MPs to the Pope in October of last year.

The Embassy works on global themes and with the Vatican to strengthen 'soft power' (to achieve objectives by building influential networks and communicating compelling narratives – it is persuasion and positive attraction, not coercion, in the world). The Ambassador continues: 'The statements the Pope makes are very important. Sometimes it is what we say that is important, sometimes it is the practical side. Two recent examples: for the South Sudan peace process declaration of 12 January, we had worked with the Community of Sant'Egidio; and we have continued to raise awareness of the persecution of religious groups in Pakistan, Iraq and Nigeria and promoted the recent independent review of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office support for persecuted Christians (presented by the Anglican Bishop of Truro, the Right Reverend Philip Mounstephen), which called for freedom of religion as a fundamental human right.'

On women: The Ambassador sees there is a need for women to take leadership roles in the Vatican and there are moves in this direction, which is encouraging. Of the 89 resident Ambassadors, 59 are women.

On refugees: The Ambassador has also worked with a group from Sant'Egidio serving meals to the homeless; the Embassy also supports the work of the Jesuit Refugee Service for migrants and refugees.

On social media: amusing moments – reading the Pope's Latin Twitter account, where debates rage as to how some very modern expressions should be rendered in Latin.

And finally, on Rome itself: 'Still, after over three years in residence, I am still overwhelmed by the beauty of Rome. And in the sunshine, it is beyond compare.'



‘No panels without women’

H.E. Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann has a full schedule

Her Excellency Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann was appointed head of the Order of Malta’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva in 2005. With a background in international civil service and diplomacy, her special concerns have centred on creating awareness of the mission and work of the Order in the context of the United Nations, where she speaks on major activities and issues.

She is currently on a very particular mission, as an international gender champion, a leadership network that brings together male and female decision-makers to break down gender barriers. Since 2015, she has committed herself to the empowerment of women and joined the ‘parity party pledge’, which campaigns for ‘no panels without women’. This involves signing up to two commitments per annum which are achievable in this context – to move gender equality forward in her organisation and its work.

Women in humanitarian action

‘A gender-based society is particularly important in humanitarian action, which calls for increased empowerment

of women all over the world. As a humanitarian institution, the Order of Malta is engaged in promoting women in its projects globally. In my daily work in Geneva, I aim to ensure gender equality amongst the Mission’s diplomatic team.’

Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann notes that there are some 40 women ambassadors representing their countries at the United Nations in Geneva and adds that the Order of Malta now has three women ambassadors.

An energetic and deeply committed member of the Order, she is involved in many aspects of its diplomatic life. The Mission promotes relations with international and intergovernmental humanitarian organisations, informs them about the activities of the Order of Malta in 120 countries and defines possible fields of cooperation. Among her many activities are her Statements at the United Nations on behalf of the Sovereign Order – in December at the Global Refugee Forum, in November at the International Organization for Migration, and earlier, Statements to the Human Rights Council, the World Health Organisation and the World Council of Churches, among others.

From 2005 to 2017, she was a member of the Board of the EORTC Cancer Research Fund (European Organization for the Research and Treatment of Cancer), whose goal is to improve the standards of cancer treatment in Europe through the evaluation of innovative drugs and new regimens.

The Ambassador organised the Order’s 2015 symposium for faith-based organisations and institutions in the humanitarian field on the topic: “Religions together for humanitarian action” at the UN in Geneva. It emphasised the importance of interfaith dialogue and the special role of faith-based actors reaching out to victims of armed conflicts, as they are often first responders, operating in local

“The Mission promotes relations with international and intergovernmental humanitarian organisations...”

communities with much trust, they speak the local language, respect traditions and human dignity, and are there, long term, simply to help. She has also recently been elected an honorary President of Religions for Peace, the world’s largest and most representative multi-religious coalition, which advances common action among the world’s religious communities and promotes the building of trust, the reduction of hostility in areas of conflict and the provision of a platform for common action.

There’s not much down time, but when she can, the Ambassador finds herself on the ski slopes, or at the local parish choir practice.



An oasis of peace:

The Holy Family Hospital, Bethlehem

Ambassador Michele Bowe describes her involvement

The Holy Family Hospital is a flagship project for the Order. It is the premier maternity hospital and neonatal critical care centre in the Bethlehem region of Palestine. Its Neonatal Intensive Care Unit cares for critically-ill newborns - the only hospital in the region capable of delivering and caring for an infant born before 32 weeks and the only Catholic maternity hospital in the region. Last year over 4,700 babies were born there.

Ambassador Michele Bowe is a Board member of the Hospital in Bethlehem and the President of its fundraising Foundation, which is based in Washington. In addition, she is the Order's Ambassador to Palestine. She travels to the Hospital regularly: 'We are the only maternity hospital with a level-three neo-natal unit. So any mother who is delivering with diabetes, any kind of heart issue, or any kind of issue that you can tell the baby is going to have, in order to save that mother's life or that baby's life she has to deliver at our hospital. So we have people coming up from the south in Hebron, from the desert areas, and from the north to deliver at our hospital.'

Sharing values and medical care

There's an ongoing residency programme for obstetricians, gynaecologists and paediatricians. 'We've trained about 70 paediatricians in the West Bank who continue to work there. So we are sharing our values and our high level of medical care across the area. We're really sort of the leaven in the medical society fabric in Palestine.'

Michele Bowe likes to refer to the hospital as "An oasis of peace" with Muslim and Christian employees working in the service of Muslim and Christian families. Nothing is ever spared, no question is ever asked; just whatever it takes to do the good work of a Catholic teaching hospital.'

A mobile clinic goes out on a set schedule daily. 'It has an awning and a generator, and we put chairs outside so people can sit - it creates community; we have a paediatrician, an obstetrician/gynaecologist, and a nurse. People come with their sick babies, or pregnant women or women who have just delivered come.'

There's also a Well Women Clinic, the only one in the region. It supports treatment as well as care for post-

menopausal women, including providing gynaecological check-ups, surgeries, and cancer screenings. 'We found that women who were past child-bearing age had not seen a doctor themselves since they delivered their last baby. So they weren't having any cancer screenings, and some were suffering from problems that come with age.'

The faiths work side by side

Bowe says Bethlehem is the second poorest governorate in Palestine after Gaza. Holy Family Hospital is one of the only employers that can pay its staff on time. The 174 members on the staff are all Palestinians, both Christians and Muslims. 'You've got the three monotheistic faiths working side-by-side in support of the most vulnerable babies of Bethlehem.'

Due to high local unemployment, a hospital employee could be supporting up to 15 relatives at a time. 'Some families in the desert areas live in caves, and they have no cash, they live on the barter economy,' Michele Bowe explains. 'The Hospital's Poor Case Fund makes it possible to provide healthcare to all who come through the doors, without regard to a family's ability to pay.'

Women have taken leadership roles in many Hospital departments: besides the all-female staff of nurse-midwives, the immediate past medical director and the heads of the NICU, pharmacy, social work department, laboratory and finance are all women. 'It quietly shows that women can be or do anything they put their minds to, in a very male-dominated society,' Bowe says.

A full-time volunteer, the Ambassador has been President of the Holy Family Foundation for about seven years, 'and a Board member for a year before that, and a supporter for over 10 years.'

Her enthusiasm is catching: 'Our doors are open as wide as we can do,' Bowe said. 'We never turn anyone away, for need or creed.'

SPECIAL EDITION: WOMEN OF THE ORDER

FIND OUT MORE

For more information about Holy Family Hospital of Bethlehem and its Foundation: birthplaceofhope.org

A message of freedom

Lebanon today

Faithful to its mission and vocation, the Order of Malta Lebanon faces the challenge of filling as much as possible the void in the health and social sectors, counting on the urgent support of the regional and international community, while protecting the message of Pope St John-Paul II: “Lebanon is more than a nation, it is a message of freedom and an example of pluralism to the East as well as the West”.

Lebanon, a country of 18 religious denominations, has been through wars, occupations and crises, struggling for years to survive in peace and coexistence, and today facing a high risk economic, financial and social situation.

The World Bank warns that the aggravation of the current economic situation would lead to an explosion of the poverty level reaching 50% of the Lebanese population, which amounts to 4,600,000 people.

Today, 1.5 million Lebanese live below the poverty line. Even before the current crisis, unemployment was 30%. Additionally, the influx of 1.5 million refugees from Syria (916,000 registered by the UNHCR, 584,000 unregistered), plus others from Palestine and Iraq, means an overall total of around 3.3 million people in dire need.

Today, 1.5 million Lebanese live with less than \$ 3.84 /day, thus one-third of the population lives under the poverty line. Among them, approximately 404,000 persons are labelled “extremely poor”, living with less than \$ 2.4 per day. Even before the crisis, the unemployment rate was 30%.

To that add the influx of refugees from Syria into Lebanon, which amounts to practically one-third of the Lebanese population, plus the refugees from different nationalities (Palestinians, Iraqi...) totalling almost 2 million people. Thus, around 3.3 million persons are in dire need of help in Lebanon.

The refugee problem has a severe effect on all vital sectors of the country, particularly in the healthcare system which requires a robust and efficient reinforcement to withstand the demands and the growth it is experiencing.





Filling the void: the Order of Malta

The Order of Malta Lebanon has been bringing communities together by working across the entire territory, from the northern to the southern borders, with all faiths and confessions, since 1957. It has established a benchmark of excellence in the fields of health and welfare, a most respected and trustworthy faith-based institution.

In all of its activities, the Order strives to provide the best expertise and talents in the fields of health and welfare, its sovereignty and diplomacy give it a unique role in humanitarian action, recognised in the fields of prevention, assistance, resilience and reconciliation.

The work on the ground

The network: The Order runs 9 primary health care and social centres; 1 fixed medical unit; 5 mobile medical units (MMU) and 2 additional in implementation; 2 day care centres for the elderly; 6 shelters (warm homes) for the elderly; 1 therapeutic educational centre for children with cerebral palsy; 1 balneotherapy centre; 2 recreational centres for people with physical and / or mental disabilities, assistance programme for Syrian refugees, assistance programme for Iraqi refugees, multiple youth projects (Youth volunteers, the Chabrouh project to care for the disabled, Caravan project which teaches young international students how, in this special setting, to care for the socially marginalised).

Achievements: This network enables the Order of Malta in Lebanon to serve 50,000 individuals annually, performing 200,000 socio-medical procedures; assisting 1,200 seniors; re-educating and teaching 100 children with cerebral palsy. The Order also provides holidays for more than 770 guests (individuals with severe physical and/or mental impairments who are often abandoned by their families) with the help of over 1,200 young volunteers from 20 nationalities; and has assisted more than 175,000 Syrian refugees since the beginning of the crisis in 2011.

It has Inter-faith collaborations with: the highest Muslim Sunni authority in Lebanon, Dar Al Fatwa, with the Supreme Shiite Islamic Council of Lebanon, the Imam Al Sadr Foundation, the highest Druze authority, Sheikh Abu Hassan Aref Halawi Foundation, in the Chouf area of the Barouk.

Little by little, my work became my life

Oumayma Farah on how she found her niche

In 2012, I professionally joined the Lebanese Association of the Knights of Malta as their Communications Officer, at the time when the Grand Magistry requested all national Order Associations to appoint a communications representative. Before that, I worked in the marketing and communications department of one of the major TV stations in Lebanon.

I didn't know much about the Order of Malta then, because they were always carrying out their works very discreetly. When I met President Marwan Sehnaoui at my first job interview, he refused to look at my CV saying that the human, spiritual and heart qualities of a person cannot be found on a piece of paper. After explaining to me the mission of the Order, he asked me to visit all the centres before a second interview where I would be asked to give my impressions. Since these are located all over the country, in very remote areas, it took a while!

In each centre I visited, every Sister I spoke with, every member of staff, every elderly, sick or differently-abled person I met during those trips left a very deep impression.

'I came, I saw, I am conquered!'

When I arrived at the interview, the first thing I told President Sehnaoui was: 'I came, I saw, I am conquered!' I was hooked! I had the urge to transmit to the Lebanese public and to the world, the amazing works being carried out by this little, discreet and humble Association – that was doing so much to relieve the pain and suffering of so many, regardless of their race, colour or religion, respecting their dignity – and which very few people knew about.

I started writing the history, the mission and the works of the Order in Lebanon, creating the website, designing brochures in three languages, publishing articles in the local and international press, producing films (the first one won the 1st prize at the Order of Malta's Rhodes film festival), launching the social media accounts, attending the Communications Forums in Rome and being guided by the amazing Grand Magistry's Communications Office who were of great support, all the while creating support communications tools to all our centres and projects.



Little by little, the Order started to grow on me and little by little, my work became my life. Volunteering in different activities and projects, taking part in every Lourdes pilgrimage, serving at the Holiday Camps for the Disabled in Chabrouh with my family... "*Tuitio fidei and obsequium pauperum*" became my engagement... the Order of Malta my second family.

Under the leadership, passion and inspiration of our president Marwan Sehnaoui, our works started growing, and the Lebanese Association started to get more and more international recognition. I am happy to say that I was able to participate in this growth, as my responsibilities also grew, becoming a spokesperson and advocating for our cause by participating in international forums such as the "Religions Together for Humanitarian Actions", organised by the Order of Malta at the United Nations in Geneva or at very high level meetings to raise awareness about the situation in Lebanon, specially with the refugee

crisis that we are facing since 2011 and now with the dramatic economic, financial and social situation.

In 2018 I was named General Delegate of the Lebanese Association and I was honored to receive the Medal of Merit. In 2019, I became a Dame of the Lebanese Association and I was recently appointed a member of the Communications Board at the Grand Magistry.

To be able to put my religion into practice, to serve our Lords the Poor and the Sick, daily through my work, having the chance to impact peoples' lives on many different levels, is the greatest gift that our Lord has granted me and I feel very much blessed for that.

SPECIAL EDITION: WOMEN OF THE ORDER

FIND OUT MORE

For more information visit
www.orderofmaltalebanon.org



‘My dear large family is Malteser!’

The Order’s St Petersburg soup kitchen cares for thousands of needy every year. IRINA TYMKOWA is its hardworking manager

The St Petersburg soup kitchen has been running for more than twenty years. Its tireless manager is Irina Tymkova, who has been involved since 1994. Irina takes up the story: ‘First I was a volunteer for the soup kitchen and for Malteser Germany’s projects in the city. Then I was secretary of Caritas and for Malteser. In 2008 I became Secretary General of the Maltese Aid Service in St Petersburg. I love what I do!’

The organisation has been an officially registered charity since 1996 and State funded since 2008 annually from the City Budget Social Committee. Since 2018 they have also received funding from the Federal Foundation in Moscow – they have been registered for 25 years and so are eligible.

How social media helps

Irina continues: We have 13 fulltime staff working in three projects. There are 10 part-timers who work with the homeless and we have 12 volunteers who attend from time to time. We find our volunteers through social media – this is very modern in Russia! They are usually doctors or nurses or sociology students and professionals.’

The Relief Service’s key projects

The Service’s three key projects are a daily canteen for elderly poor, where they feed about 250 people; a daily mobile shelter for the disabled and the homeless – 50 per night; and a ‘Mother and Child’ support service which helps destitute families and offers social services for about 400 a week.

As well, the organisation cares for economic migrants – they come from all over Russia and from the ‘Stans’. They find jobs quickly and also very small rented rooms. But they are all without papers and they have no funds to return home. The Relief Service project ‘The way home’ helps transport them home, or to their last official registration.

Social conditions are such that there is poverty but it is not growing. But every second Russian family lives on debt – the average monthly wage is 1100 euro per family. In 2018, mortgage

loans increased by 70% more than the previous year and so the families have little money for anything else.

Healthcare is not free and problems begin when people get sick. Health insurance is basic – it doesn’t cover operations or diagnostics or dental issues. And so the elderly are always saving for healthcare.

When Irina can take a little time from her very busy and absorbing schedule, she goes to her dacha in the countryside where she grows herbs, berries and mushrooms. Sport is a relaxation too – she plays tennis, swims, and skis in the winter in Finland. She needs languages to communicate with her international colleagues, and learned German at evening classes before working as an au pair in Germany. She now speaks English too. Her own family is small – she has her mother, but no siblings – but, as she says, ‘My dear, large family is Malteser!’



Statue of Mother Teresa in New York; Ann Ryan at Lourdes

On meeting a saint

Ann Ryan recalls a very moving encounter with Mother Teresa

Ann Ryan has been a member of the Order for a very long time and was a founding member of the OMV, with whom she worked in Lourdes for years. She still does. ‘Our duties included peeling carrots at unearthly hours, making beds till our backs hurt, and assisting guests at the Baths.’ One of the wonderful experiences in her long life has been to meet Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

In the 1970s, Ann joined a group of friends travelling to Rajasthan, and then went on to Calcutta (now known as Kolkata) as she wanted to visit the work of Mother Teresa*. Over subsequent years, she made six visits, each lasting three weeks.

‘The first time, we stayed in a grotty hotel,’ she remembers, ‘but met two friends there who were working in a home for the dying. So I went there too, loved it, loved the atmosphere.’ She went on to explain that the home

was part of a convent, established by Mother Teresa, which had a hundred sisters and about twenty volunteers all of whom worked in a project to help the dying, and orphaned children. At the time, the sisters had five hospices in Calcutta. As a visitor, Ann could join the morning Mass in the conventual chapel. Then she queued to meet Mother Teresa to ask how she could help the project. Ann describes her:

‘She was direct, with penetrating eyes, and wrinkles you wouldn’t believe, tiny, very approachable. You knew she was someone special. She could intuit. She spoke English with a strong accent and vague grammar – but it didn’t matter, the message was there!’

Mother Teresa attended Mass every morning and worked till the small hours. On one occasion, Ann and her friend had arrived in Calcutta in the middle of the night, bringing stocks of medicines with them. They knocked at the convent

door and Mother Teresa opened it. The project operated with the brothers in the local monastery. The brothers had a van which went round the city and over to the central station, to collect the abandoned children – who were living on the platforms, with no one to look after them – and bring them to the sisters. Mother Teresa’s rule, on taking in these children, was that they had to be de-loused and washed. ‘In the heat, their clothes dried almost immediately.’

“She was direct, with penetrating eyes, and wrinkles you wouldn’t believe, tiny, very approachable. You knew she was someone special...”

Ann recalls that the foundress had very strict rules for the sisters: they were never to eat in anyone else’s house – because of the poverty; and they were always to move around in pairs. She also ruled that no fundraising was ever to be done in her personal name: it was God’s will – if he wanted something to happen, it would work.

**Mother Teresa was canonised in 2016.*



'Being a doctor in Lourdes is fun!'

Keeping a pledge

Anne de Bono on how she became the first woman Chief Medical Officer for the British Association in Lourdes

It was almost by accident that I became involved in the Order of Malta's work. Originally from Lancashire my family background is recusant, but not grand, rooted in a tradition of English Catholicism where faith was simply part of life rather than a conscious choice. My only knowledge of the Order at that time was an awareness that amongst my parents' friends was Dr Peter Wren, for many years the British Association's Lourdes Medical Officer.

As a medical student in Cambridge I met my husband David de Bono, from Malta via Downside. He became a distinguished cardiologist and died

too early of motor neurone disease in 1999, working as a doctor and a medical researcher until his last day. A chance encounter at the Royal College of Physicians between David and his Downside contemporary, Dr Jonathan Turner, led to the de Bonos joining our first British Association Lourdes pilgrimage in 1998 as Medical Officers under Jonathan's leadership. 'Medically fascinating, socially challenging and theologically ... well interesting' was David's subsequent description but he made a firm commitment, with me, to return the following year – 'DV' as he wrote in the nurses' notebook.

It was not to be but I went back in May 2000, feeling that this was a pledge to be kept. Over the next two years Jonathan gradually transferred the Chief Medical Officer baton to me, the first woman in the role, which I held until 2017 when I passed it on to Brian MacGreevy. Each CMO brings different strengths to the clinical team. Jonathan Turner was rooted in excellent hospital consultant medical practice; I followed with insights from my day job as an occupational physician with responsibility for the safe working and wellbeing of healthcare workers, i.e. translated for Lourdes as our teams of helpers.

Perhaps my interest in keeping people at work, without undue risks, and my personal experience of the effects of, and prejudices encountered because of, David's disability coloured my approach. I've often remarked that pilgrims staying in the Accueil are kind enough to allow themselves to be called 'sick' in order that others, often with significant health issues of their own, may have the privilege of looking after them. My particular contribution was to offer functional notes about the needs of the Accueil pilgrims to the Team Leaders, to help them in their planning for our

guests, thus complementing the clinical summaries which my predecessor developed for the clinical team.

Excellent relationships within the British Association Lourdes committee are crucial and I count myself fortunate in those with whom I have worked, especially the Secretaries to the Accueil pilgrims, the Hospitallers, Chefs d'Accueil and Head Nurses and their teams. The late Henry Nelson

when Secretary to the Sick, as the title used to be, taught me the difference between what he called 'engineering' decisions, which were for him to make, and medical ones for the doctor. Above all, I have to say that being a doctor in Lourdes is fun!

In 2018 I moved to another role within the Order, as Medical Trustee on the Board of the Orders of St John Care Trust. The role is to contribute to good

governance rather than to direct care, very different from working in Lourdes. Once again I followed a distinguished predecessor in Neil Weir, and came to the role from another clinical specialty. I feel that I still have much to learn about the Care Homes but recognise that in a different setting they too represent the Order's tradition of aiming to offer the best of care to people irrespective of their personal status or beliefs.



Maggie Hood Elwes, Tot Charlton, Mary Padfield, Victoria Huntington-Whiteley

belts is a recent widow and we had a nasty moment when she admitted that she and her late husband always drove over the Pennines together to get the elastic, but she doesn't drive much if at all now. However, she has just told me that there is a new man in her life who has a motorised caravan, so he can help. Phew! The mug people come from the Potteries, and they are unfailingly patient except for one year when we wanted an entirely gold mug, and 250 of them exploded in the kiln.

This year's most sought-after item will be? Perhaps it's the new earring we have commissioned, and also a reappearance of a cufflink from long ago, but this time with dress studs for evening wear.

How does an average day in the shop run? It starts after breakfast and doesn't stop until about 7 pm. Sometimes we put a "Chiuso" note up, but usually we take turns to eat (or drink!).

Most amusing request? Maybe it was from the Frenchman who asked if the following year we could offer corgis as well as our teddies. 'They are so British!'

Where do the profits go? Entirely to the British Association pilgrimage. Maggie decides how much we can afford to give each year, and all the rest goes to pay for our stock next year. We have an interesting way of calculating how much we can give to the British Association, how much we can afford to spend on new stock, and never ask us what our profit is! On some things it is 200% and others we only just break even.

Planning Lourdes

The Lourdes shop, an institution in itself, is precisely organised

The British Association's participation in the Order's annual international Lourdes pilgrimage demands careful planning and seamless organisation. A special feature is the highly profitable fundraiser 'the Lourdes shop', which is set up in La Solitude and run by 'the Lourdes ladies' – the indefatigable quartet* (see above) who work for much of the year collecting irresistible items of quality to offer. Here they reveal what's involved...

How long have you been running the Lourdes Shop? It started with Kenneth Wagg, Adam Macmillan, Victoria and Mary in about 1994.

What is its aim? To raise money for the British Association pilgrimage

What does the preparation for each "sell out year" look like? Well, we

start again each September and it goes on from then, rising to panic stations usually at the end of April just before we leave for Lourdes. Last year Mary left 40 pairs of black cufflinks in a taxi and she then discovered that there are no working police stations any more in central London...

How do you assess your suppliers (quality of materials/workmanship)?

We have known most of our suppliers for many years and they have become friends. The quality has to be right or we have a not very quiet word with them, but in the main the quality is very good indeed. Our belts, badges and some of the cufflinks come from the jewellery quarter in Birmingham and are made by Ray (our new boy) who is 87 years old, and the third supplier from there – the other two are dead, in even riper old age. Thelma who makes our ladies



Outreach near the Order's day centre for marginalised children in Beregovo, Ukraine © Ukrainian Relief Service;

Smiling faces at the Order's 'Help Me Grow' nutrition programme in Mexico © Mexican Association;

Volunteers in Lithuania share food and companionship with those who are housebound © Lithuanian Relief Service.

from around the world, there are also hundreds of thousands of marginalised people whose stories go unheard, suffering in silence – In Thailand, refugee families unable to access education and healthcare; in Madagascar, young mothers preparing for childbirth without sufficient medical support; disabled teenagers languishing in cell-like rooms in Lebanon. We do not hear about these people in our news reports, but their humanity demands our compassion and compels a response.

An effective and vital fundraising resource

Each year, the Fund supports Order of Malta works serving some of the world's most marginalised in two grant cycles. In 2019, 77 grants were awarded to works in 26 countries, making it a record-breaking year for the charity. A catalogue of compassion, these Order initiatives include many of the British Association's programmes in the UK as well as healthcare and social support for leprosy sufferers in Cambodia, primary schooling for refugee children in Paris, and fighting malnutrition in Mexico. They rescue young girls caught in the web of human trafficking, integrate displaced people alienated by their new communities, and empower ex-offenders to break free from destructive substance addictions. Order volunteers visit Juozas twice a week, making sure he has the food he needs to stay alive and breaking through his isolation. For the volunteers, often the hardest part of these visits is saying goodbye.

Robust process and due diligence

The Fund was set up to provide a cost-effective, professional mechanism for donors to support the global works of the Order anywhere in the world. Donations are accepted tax-efficiently in 19 different jurisdictions, allowing

Remembering the Forgotten

The Order of Malta's Global Fund supports life-changing initiatives. Emily van Lier and Poppy McLean explain

Delivering relief and restoring dignity

The Global Fund was established by Lisa Simpson in 2012 and has since grown and extended its support for Order projects around the world. At the heart of the Order's work lies the conviction that every human being deserves dignity and respect. From the Companions Café in London to the Cruz de Malta Kindergarten in Brazil, a global network of Order volunteers and employees delivers lifelines of practical support to those in need. The Global Fund for Forgotten People supports the fulfilment of the Order's commitment to those most in need by raising funds and awareness for these life-changing initiatives.

Who are the forgotten people?

Juozas is 85, and lives alone in a small flat in Marijampole, Lithuania. Since his wife died a year ago, the space seems especially dark and small. The loss left Juozas isolated and overwhelmed with grief. His grief led to arrhythmia, and a fear of further complications. After a few months, he moved into a state-run care centre for the elderly. He moved out just two weeks later, having been violently assaulted by his roommates. Alone, grieving and struggling to survive on a meagre state pension, Juozas' existence is almost unbearable.

Sadly, Juozas' invisible misery is not uncommon. Although we are constantly bombarded by news stories

gifts to be maximised and grants to be distributed effectively on a global scale. The Fund provides a high standard of donor care and due diligence, and maintains a robust, streamlined process so that gifts make a meaningful difference. Donations can be directed towards specific areas of work or themes, such as the elderly or the homeless, and all supporters are kept updated on the impact their gift can make. Gifts given in lieu of presents for birthdays or special events, and legacies are an important way of supporting the Fund. Please contact us for more information on how you can do this.

Remembering the forgotten in 2020

A disadvantaged child laughing and playing in a new kindergarten, a leprosy sufferer succeeding in a supported business venture, an elderly person being made to feel part of a community for the first time in years, this is the beating heart of the Order's global mission. Every grant awarded by the Fund brings our charisms to life, and relies on the generosity of our donors. To help in our mission to remember the forgotten and support those facing poverty, sickness and isolation today visit www.forgottenpeople.org or call us on 01844 318708.

SPECIAL EDITION: WOMEN OF THE ORDER

FIND OUT MORE

Sign up to our newsletter and follow us on Facebook (@TheGlobalFundForForgottenPeople); Instagram (@orderofmalta_globalfund) or Twitter (@GlobalForgotten) to learn more.

Emily van Lier is chief philanthropy officer for the Fund in Britain. Poppy McLean is fund raising and support officer.



Rehabilitation

Joanna Whitaker describes this new activity for the Order

A rather unique model

With the Order's involvement, Nehemiah has been able to expand its important and worthwhile operations and in June 2019 opened a second primary house in Croydon accommodating a further cohort of men. It is now looking for another (secondary) stage housing to support the men as they continue to thrive. It is hoped that expansion will occur in other parts of the country as a further replication of this rather unique model. Statistically, Nehemiah shows consistently 'above average' results in terms of recovery – a notoriously difficult marker to define due to the lack of longitudinal studies.

So how did I get involved? For the past 15 years or so, I have worked in the field of addiction and graduated with a first class degree in Addictions Counselling in June 2012. I am a Certified Addiction Recovery Coach (2013) and a member of the Federation of Drug and Alcohol Professionals (FDAP). It was during the May 2016 Pilgrimage to Lourdes that Nehemiah first came my way – and that the British Association, via funding from The Global Fund for Forgotten People, was looking to launch a prison ministry of which addiction rehabilitation for ex-prisoners would be a part, and the rest, as they

say, is history. Shortly after that, I met with Nehemiah and joined the Board as an Order-nominated Trustee.

The promise of a brighter future

The future? We are looking at ways in which Order volunteers may become involved. It's a very different 'ask' to some of the other British Association projects. Regular potential engagement revolves around monthly lunches at one of the primary houses and quarterly 'graduations' (marking the men's completion of the programme). Volunteer engagement necessitates commitment and continuity – these men have often been badly let down by circumstances, society, 'the system' – or even themselves. Potential volunteers would need to undergo training and be subject to a DBS check. But for these men – and for us all – there is always hope and the promise of change and a new and brighter future.

The Nehemiah Project was founded more than twenty years ago and is a Christian-based rehabilitation centre for male ex-prisoners with addiction issues. Around 2016 the British Association was introduced to Nehemiah towards exploring its nascent prison ministry and the partnership has since developed. What it does is to provide housing and a 3-month programme to enable and assist residents to address their manifold issues in a safe and secure environment.

The majority of referrals are the men who come straight from prison. The main outreach is from a member of Nehemiah's housing team who interviews and assesses a potential resident. Upon discharge from prison, a home is available at Nehemiah in a welcoming and friendly setting. Typically, the men will be aged between 25 and 65 and (most) criminal activity will have been committed to fund their habit of substance abuse.

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FIND OUT MORE

For more information
www.tnp.org.uk



Making history

Celestria Hales on her two new roles in the Order

Last April a tiny bit of history was made, when I was elected to the Government Council in Rome, the first woman elected to the role. It has only taken 900 years! Then on St John's Day I became Vice President of the British Association of the Order, following the footsteps but I fear never filling the shoes of Patricia, Lady Talbot, who served with distinction for many years. The two roles are keeping me busy and I hope out of trouble. As Vice President I continue on the Council of the British Association, where I had served two terms, as well as on various committees in support of the President.

Recommendations and followup contact are the key to encouragement

The Government Council is the second tier below the Sovereign Council. It consists of six elected members and

four co-opted. Rather grandly we can advise the Sovereign Council, the top tier of government of the Order, but our main role is visitations (sic) to Associations and Grand Pories on behalf of the Grand Master. Each is to be visited every five years. Having been assured mine would be in Europe I was naturally sent to Senegal, where the Order has its only African Association. Patrick Jabre from the Lebanon came with me – incidentally, he too became Vice President in 2019 – and luckily his French is perfect. The Senegalese, as Alan Furness, who was Her Majesty's Ambassador there, will confirm, are charming and hospitable, as well as very religious. I only hope they were not too appalled by my dress – Air France lost my luggage and I had to wash my tee shirt in the basin every night. Patrick very kindly lent me a spare but it was

huge and decorated with designer logos.

After each visitation we report back to Rome but in addition follow up with recommendations and continuing contact. It is very much a two-way street, not an inspection or audit. We aim to carry our two visitations a year each in spring and autumn. My next two are in Europe thankfully.

My election came about because I served on the working group of the

'Throughout the world, women are the backbone of the Order'

Order's reform process, which looked at the role of women in the Order. Briefly it was agreed that dames should be eligible for all roles, other than those reserved for the professed. Incidentally, whether women could become professed was discussed and for some women it remains an aspiration in the long term. Meanwhile improving the culture internationally is a priority. There are still Associations with no dames, although there are now several women Presidents and some holding other senior offices. No doubt there will be more to come. It is clear that throughout the world women are the backbone of the Order, even if their roles are not always given full credit.

My own life in the Order goes back to the 1960s, when my father, Lord Gainsborough, was President of the British Association and used to bring me back a Bernadette doll from Lourdes each year. I first went myself aged 18 (pre OMV – I was the token youngster). In 1983 I became the youngest dame in the British Association. Technically, unmarried women had to be 35 but I got a dispensation. My father was very pleased when my sister Maria and I joined. None of our brothers have done so. She went on to do a great deal both in Lourdes, with retreats, and with him in the early days of the Orders of St John Care Trust Homes. He always encouraged us but I think he would be astonished to see me taking my place at the table in the Grand Magistracy, with the Sovereign Council and my confreres on the Government Council. I only hope to make him proud.



Setting up the Chancellery

The Vice Chancellor explains how it came about

Stephanie Pissarro has been the British Association's Vice Chancellor since January 2016 – she is the first woman to hold this Office.

Stephanie was involved in organising the complicated move of the Association's offices from north London to its current home in Putney. 'We were really busy moving all our files, furniture and Order archives,' she explains, 'plus having to refurbish the new location, from top to bottom, and settling in to the new Chancellery, with all the attendant admin needed. A big move, a small budget, so rather challenging. It was fun but demanding too.'

Since then the Vice Chancellor has continued to work with Chancellor Michael Hodges and the Association's stalwart Secretariat, Caroline de la

Force: 'On anything from checking if the roof is sound to hosting the Malteser International meeting at the Chancellery. That was a most enjoyable event, arranging Mass for the participants, and the meeting logistics, as well as lunch and dinner – and learning about what each one does to assist this important international Order activity.'

Getting to know the Order more closely

The Vice Chancellor is enjoying all of it – the more surprising and unexpected the better – and says 'It has allowed me to get to know the Order more closely and to appreciate just how much work goes on behind the scenes to make everything happen and it is rewarding

to assist where I can or where there is a gap at any crucial time.' She deputises for the Chancellor when necessary – a recent example was the Annual Requiem in Edinburgh, where she both gave the reading and led the Order's prayer at the end of the service.

Another task is organising the 'members only' drinks the evening before St John's Day – keeping tabs on who is coming, checking that the canapes are up to scratch, ensuring everyone has a great time and gets to know other members they may not have met before – an event that is a kind of British Association networking.

Many extra activities have become part of the role – for example, encouraging members to go on the retreats organised each year, answering questions about the uniforms and decorations, or about the Formation process, advising on Lourdes requests for information – there is always something to be attended to, or followed up, or someone who needs assistance. Under Stephanie's aegis, the role has become an important element in the efficient running of the British Association.



Helping the homeless

Silvia Badiali describes the activity and reflects on the issues of homelessness

Every Monday evening just before 5, a white van leaves from St. James's church, Spanish Place and starts a journey which will end in Lincoln's Inn Fields – as the largest London public square, it has attracted homeless people since the 1980s – at around 9pm.

The van route is bizarre, resembling more the zig zag course of a mad mosquito than a trajectory planned according to distances and traffic! The reason for the strange circuit is that we pick up the leftovers from different locations of the food-to-go 'Eat' in central London – food which would otherwise be thrown away. We deliver it to the homeless in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The route is complicated because the leftovers can only be collected in the

half hour after the different closing times of each shop: too early and clients are still being served, too late and the staff has already left.

The soup kitchen is in its seventh year

This is the Order of Malta soup kitchen. It started distributing food to the homeless in Lincoln's Inn Fields in the summer of 2013 and still does. I have often helped since the start and during these years I have become familiar with other volunteers and some of the homeless, our guests, and have speculated about the different personal stories which have brought them there.

Having collected the leftovers from the various 'Eats', plus the water, fruit

and chocolate we buy on the way, in the back of the van we sort what we have into different crates, so distribution is faster and smoother: sandwiches are divided between 'anything with meat', 'anything with cheese', and 'vegetarian'; pastries go with yogurts, and salads with soups. When we arrive at Lincoln's Inn Fields we find our guests already queuing.

We ask each guest what they would like and try to find the best possibility available – not always easy as variety is sometimes limited, and guests' requests and attitudes can vary. A few are very kind, happy to receive whatever is there and thank with a smile. Others can be particular and may show they are not

'A few guests sometimes stare at me or at the emptiness in front of them, silent'

happy with what they get or do not get. Some ask for vegetarian or vegan; others for meat; some for something easy to chew – teeth can sadly be a problem for the homeless. Some do not seem to have reasons for their specific requests: for example, they may want a sandwich with chicken and avocado, but not with chicken and salad or not with turkey.

Collecting the food in our van

Guests' needs can seem quite basic to the non-homeless. Once I was asked for the wipes package next to me in the van. But it was empty and the person asking looked really disappointed. I remembered to bring an extra one the following week and was happy that the person who had asked for it was there again, and he was happy I remembered. A tiny gesture thanked with a big smile on both sides.

What is homelessness?

It looks like not all the 'guests' are actually homeless: the real ones can be easily recognised for the multiple layers and bad state of their clothes, their rough appearance and sometimes, even more sadly, their smell. Other guests may sleep rough intermittently or maybe have not been homeless at all. Many may just be people who are struggling to make ends meet. It is a situation not difficult to find in London, where the cost of living is high, where often the families of origin are far away or non-existent and cannot provide the social safety net which sometimes can be found in Southern Europe. Some men, after having served in the army, have found rejoining civilian life very difficult. Others may have been thrown out of their homes following a divorce or a separation, or because they have become dangerous to their partners and children, due to mental illness and/or addiction to alcohol or drugs.

Mental illness is a major problem in the homeless community: even those lucky enough to have seen a doctor and been prescribed medication may not find it easy to follow the instructions. A few sometimes stare at me or at the emptiness in front of them, silent, for many long seconds, while I ask them what they would like and those queuing behind wait, more or less patiently.

We serve between 30 and 80 guests, depending on season and weather: more in the summer and fewer when it rains. These numbers have been rather consistent since the programme started. Few are women: maybe one in every 20 guests, three or four per evening.



The problems in rough sleeping

Rough sleeping is a complex problem: it is associated with relationship breakdown, addiction, abuse, domestic violence, mental illness. However a main driver is the cost and availability of housing. Providing stable accommodation can be cheaper for societies than dealing with the consequences of rough sleeping. Being homeless makes it hard to give up drugs or crime: stable accommodation can cut the crime rate and reduce the need for the police, for time spent in hospital or in prison. Those with accommodation are also more likely to find a job, in addition to the obvious advantages of a safer and better life.

Distributing food on our Monday evenings — less than a drop in the ocean of the problem of homelessness and poverty — does not require an answer nor even to think about these difficult questions: we just need to look



for the best choice of food in what is available, hand it out with a smile, and be content if some guests smile back and thank us. We volunteers know that soon we will be back in the comfort of our homes and our hot baths: not many of our guests will be lucky enough to be off the streets for the coming night.

SPECIAL EDITION: WOMEN OF THE ORDER

FIND OUT MORE

For more information visit
www.orderofmalta.org.uk/companions



Wednesday fixtures

Georgie Holt Evans looks back on five rewarding years at the Colchester soup kitchen

The Colchester meals for the homeless have now been going for about five years and have proven to be very popular and a real success. We have approximately 6-15 men and women who attend each week. We also have a wonderful team of helpers – Jane, Sally, Gemma, Caroline, Charlotte, Chris, Christine, Clara, Laura and Adrian and myself. I started the project because it was evident that although many homeless were catered for in the evenings, they had nothing to eat and nowhere to go at lunchtime.

There are summer menus and winter menus

We aim to serve our guests hot meals from September to April in the form of a shepherd's pie or chicken casserole or sausages and mash and baked beans, always accompanied by fruit, biscuits, crisps and sometimes a basic pudding (such as jelly and custard or yoghurt). In addition we make up sandwiches to order for them to take away, with a variety of fillings (cheese, ham, egg mayonnaise, chicken). In the summer (April to September) we serve either toasted sandwiches or a really good lettuce salad with tomatoes and a

choice of ham, chicken, potato salad, pork pies, and coleslaw or hard boiled eggs to accompany. Again there are crisps, fruit and biscuits and sandwiches to take away. All meals, summer and winter, are served with a choice of tea, coffee and soft drinks.

And a special Christmas menu

At Christmas we serve our guests roast turkey with chipolatas and roast potatoes, roast parsnips and sprouts with gravy and bread sauce, mince pies and cream for pudding and a delicious chocolate log. We usually serve 30 guests at our Christmas lunch in December.

Over the years our guests have increased in number from as little as five in the beginning to now sometimes up to 22. They all come via word of mouth or through St James the Less church in Priory Street (next to the Hall we hire) in Colchester or St Theresa's in Lexden and there are very many regulars who come every week depending on their health. They range from 30-60 in age and are all British and in search of food, a hot drink and company and help. We regularly have a clothing table, and books too, which they love. Many are bright and

well educated. As far as the volunteers are concerned we have a rota of four helpers each week and they are all given specific duties (shopping, cooking, washing up, serving or chatting) always with Adrian Rowley or myself present or

“The volunteers throw themselves in with huge hearts ...”

more often than not both of us. All the volunteers have thrown themselves in with huge hearts and nothing is ever too much trouble for any of them.

A hot potato...

One rather amusing thing that happened at Christmas was that Christine, who was in charge of supplying her delicious homemade roast potatoes to accompany the turkey, was delayed as her Aga wasn't working to full strength. We waited and waited for her to zip across Colchester – with the potatoes ready and hot enough to serve with the roast turkey! Very stressful at the time, but we did all have a laugh afterwards as we watched our guests finally enjoy their roast Christmas lunch –with the potatoes a late but very welcome addition!! That was our reward!

In 2003 a dear neighbour went to live in Burnham House in Malmesbury – it is one of the Orders of St John (OSJCT) care homes – and I became a regular visitor. It was an old style home with a great atmosphere thanks to some wonderful staff – which is something that every OSJCT home I have visited has in common. Until then, I had no experience of care homes whatsoever and reckoned that they were God’s waiting rooms with people sitting sadly round a room in silence. How different the OSJCT reality it is, and while the residents may be elderly there are plenty of young faces around too, among the carers, volunteers and visitors.

In 2006 I became a proper volunteer. I think that was the year the Companions of the Order of Malta in England were just getting going and I signed up with Henry Lorimer. I mostly helped in the day centre doing anything needed. With friends, I organised trips for the residents to private houses and gardens. Still now the residents love getting out and about. They particularly like sitting round a cosy fire or a kitchen table in somebody’s house or walking through flower gardens.

We live in Cirencester, just a six minute bike ride from OSJCT’s Paternoster House, another old style care Home. There are now four Companions of the Order there, doing great things. One is running an art class, another is helping with the ever popular bingo, while another takes in a group of 16-year-olds (her grandchildren and their friends) to run an after school French club. The residents enjoy watching and taking part when they can. My two youngest grandchildren, aged 10 and 8, love visiting – and not just because they are allowed to take in a box of chocolates to offer the residents! I am an irregular visitor there but still try to organise outings to friends’ houses.

Activities are varied and absorbing

The Homes’ Activity Coordinators are wonderful at thinking up things within each Home, and also arrange visiting entertainments. Anything which involves music is a great success. Volunteers turn their hands and skills to all sorts of things. I know many Homes have gardening clubs, and



Being a befriender

**The Order runs 70 residential homes in four counties
Sarah Cornell is a long-standing ‘volunteer befriender’**

when I visited the Henry Cornish Care Home in Chipping Norton recently, the residents were taking cuttings with a volunteer from the local garden centre; at Jubilee Lodge they do cooking; at the Lakes Care Centre there is a Men’s Club. I have yet to discover more about it. There are certainly many more women in the Homes than men and it seems the same with the volunteers.

As Paternoster House has quite a few volunteers, I have just started visiting at The Lakes Care Centre, a few miles outside Cirencester. I take my terrier with me – she loves lying on her back to have her tummy tickled. It is great to see how this prompts conversations, as most people seem to have had something to do with dogs in their life.

A most rewarding experience

I am fortunate to have two OSJCT Homes nearby so I can bob in with my dog or grandchildren. I think I would be called a volunteer “befriender”. Volunteers are needed in most of the OSJCT homes. There are many things to help with so it is important to have people of different ages and with different skills and interests. After all, the residents come from different parts of the country and have different stories to tell of their lives. Of course many have dementia of some sort but there is help at hand and guidance for volunteers.

Volunteering with OSJCT has been and continues to be for me a most rewarding and happy experience.

Every gesture helps

Veronica Hodges writes:

On learning of the need for volunteers to staff the Reception desk at Meadowcroft, Thame, Oxfordshire, an OSJCT Home, weekday evenings, 5-7 pm – a time when visitor numbers increase and need to be welcomed in – Veronica Hodges took up the challenge. In consultation with Companions Vice President Charles Nicholson she has launched a volunteer drive, together with local parish priest Fr. David Hartley at St Joseph’s. ‘Fr David has been brilliant – already recruiting 12 volunteers.’ The service starts in March.

FIND OUT MORE

To enquire about volunteering in an OSJCT Home (there are 70 in four counties), email volunteer@osjct.co.uk or for volunteer opportunities by town/postcode go to www.osjct.co.uk/volunteer-us



The London Tea Parties

Chat, tea and cakes: Helena Letman describes bringing together the generations to fight isolation

In 2015, the activities for the homeless and the poor organised by the London Companions of the Order of Malta were gaining momentum and inspired by the fantastic monthly Northumberland Tea Parties run by our northern colleagues, we decided to bring this Tea Party initiative to London, where our chairman felt we weren't doing enough to fight the increasing problem of isolation of the elderly.

With the reports of jolly gatherings with plenty of chats, tea and cake, the idea of hosting our own London Tea Parties was kick started. Soon enough, the Companions had approached the Oratory Fathers, who without hesitation allowed us to use St Joseph's Hall (their church hall) at the London Oratory for our gatherings. Lovely Sister Margaret from St Winfrid's Care Home was keen to bring her residents (providing we organised a bus) and suggested we

invite the Chelsea Pensioners too, who were delighted to accept the offer of tea, cakes, songs and chats. Companions, Dames and Knights rallied round and were keen to help out in any way they could, and the making of delicious sandwiches and cakes began.

So, with guests, venue, food and transport secured, a trip to IKEA for all the kit done, and most importantly, our resident pianist, Chris, on board to orchestrate the singalong, our inaugural London Oratory Tea Party was held on 18th November 2015.

Five years on and going strong

Now, nearly five years on, we have held around 20 tea parties, starting with 18 guests from two care homes to nearly 50 guests from four care homes and about 10-15 independently living elderly. It has become a custom that English classics are sung, from 'The White Cliffs of

Dover' to 'We'll Meet Again'. The guests are almost word perfect and sing with gusto! Then a delicious traditional tea with cucumber sandwiches and scones at the beautifully laid tables is served by our fabulous team – they range from 6 months to 90 years – a combination which brings the generations together. The hall is filled with laughter and little children doing their magic which is a sure way to lift the mood and bring a smile to all our guests.

The chat, singing, cakes and tea have brought old and young together and real friendships have been forged. This bond is palpable when you witness all the kisses and hugs upon arrival and some tears hastily wiped away upon departure when, laden with parting gifts of flowers and good bye chocolates, our guests board their buses and we wave goodbye... until 'We'll meet again'!

Thank You

Kate Mackenzie to the helpers, after another bumper year, describes bringing together the generations to fight isolation



Dear Volunteers, Members, Companions, who make up the success of the London Thursday evening soup kitchen.

I just want to thank you so very much for all your help over the last year - whether it is one week, one month or 50 weeks. We have achieved an enormous amount for our guests and the soup kitchen would not be able to keep going without the support and care of all the volunteers.

It was lovely to see so many of you at the Christmas party – a fitting end to an extremely busy lead up to Christmas, preparing 800 Christmas parcels with 19 items in each parcel for London and the regions.

But I would especially like to thank everyone who downed tools and rushed to my aid throughout the whole year. For example, over the summer when lots of soup kitchens close in London and we have more guests and fewer volunteers, yet we manage to stay open.

And thank you:

- For answering to an email, that went out at noon, to get to Spanish Place the same day and carry 64 crates of pheasant casserole from the pavement to the store room in driving rain, or the time 120 pairs of shoes, or 160 coats, were delivered.
- For making enormous dishes of food on your valuable days off work.
- For coming when it was freezing cold or boiling hot.
- For being creative when the sink blocked, the pipes burst – meaning you were standing in a pool of water – or the hall's electrical circuit fused, leaving us with no hot water and little light.
- For lugging boxes up and down those slippery stairs in all weathers.

And finally, never raising your eyebrows or tutting when I ask you to do some gruesome job! But mainly I want to thank you for caring for Our Lords the poor.

Here are some quotes from them: *“We feel safe and loved here”*; *“I find it easier getting through the week, knowing that Thursday will come round again and I will be back here”*; *“This is the best place in London for realising that we don't want just food; we love the books, music, people”*; *“yes ... mental stimulation is so important for us on the street - we have such little chance to have a proper conversation with anyone who is not in the same circumstances as we are”*; *“I thought I would come for the food, but it's not that. It's everything!”*; *“The volunteers here are amazing – they are really interested in my week, not just pretending to be interested.”*

Kate



GRAND MAGISTRY



Among Grand Master Fra' Giacomo Dalla Torre's recent engagements: in January, he visited Benin and inspected the Order's 140-bed hospital in Djougou, run by Ordre de Malte France since 1974. In February he received President of Hungary, Janos Ader, who expressed appreciation of the Order's Hungarian Relief Corps (MMSz), one of the country's major health and welfare agencies. It manages 350 units, with a staff of 5000 and 15,000 volunteers. Later in the month, the President of Malta, George Vella, is received at the Magistral Palace. The Maltese Association's activities include help for the terminally ill, distribution of hot meals to the poor and first aid to migrants and refugees.

USA



A renewal of the pilgrim spirit: in north east Florida, members of the American Association take part in the 3rd Annual Baby Steps Camino™. Over 150 pilgrims follow a 30 mile beach walking pilgrimage from Jacksonville Beach to St. Augustine, to arrive at Our Lady of La Leche National Shrine.

IRAQ



Northern Iraq: with the return of displaced families to the Nineveh Plains post-ISIS, Malteser International, the Order's international relief agency, is working to restore social cohesion, with three partners: Women Rehabilitation Organization (WRO), Peace and Freedom Organization (PFO) and Un Ponte Per (UPP). Tharaa A. Simaan, Monitoring and Evaluation Assistant for the programme: 'We believe women have an equally fundamental role to play in conflict prevention and dialogue as they are mostly responsible for transferring values of tolerance and peace to their children. It is very important that they are empowered to have equal and full participation as active agents in peacebuilding.'

AUSTRALIA



As bushfires raged through east coast Australia, Order members launched a nation-wide appeal for victims and brought parcels of food and basic necessities to the stricken. A thank you letter from one recipient: "I write to thank your organisation most sincerely for your caring support of us at this time...I applaud the worthy work that the Order of Malta does, most earnestly."

CUBA



In Cuba today there are 58 parish dining halls or soup kitchens throughout the island, subsidised by the Cuban Association. Over 800,000 meals are served per year, primarily to the elderly. Medical missions visit the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Ecuador and Panama. Typically, the all-volunteer team has eight to ten doctors, an equal number of nurses and physicians' assistants, and several non-medics who help distribute materials and medicines. All medicines are given free. A typical mission, conducted over a three-day weekend, treats 1,000-1,300 patients.

FRANCE



Anyone can become a volunteer first aid worker: the Civil Security department of Ordre de Malte France operates a highly trained team of volunteers across the nation, and explains that to become a rescuer is to become a player in civil security. As part of a team of volunteers, participants are trained in life saving actions as a team, so that they can quickly intervene wherever a qualified presence is necessary.