



## **The Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem**

*Grand Master: H.E. Don Francisco de Borbón Graf von Hardenberg GCLrLJ, GCLJ*

### **The Grand Priory of England and Wales**

*Grand Prior: The Most Honourable the Marquis of Lothian PC, GCLJ, GCMLJ, KC, DL*

*Bailiff: Dr David A. Woolf KCLJ, OMLJ*

*From the Office of:*  
**The Grand Prior**

Advent 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At the dawn of this year I tried to encourage an outlook of optimism and positivity at a time when much darkness was about us. The war in Ukraine raged on, the rise in the cost of living seemed entrenched, industrial disputes proliferated, dangerous viral infections continued to hover, and all under the thin ice calm between Jew and Arab in the Middle East.

Yet, the Order has in this year achieved much for those in the greatest need. From the start of the year our World Leprosy Day 2023 appeal raised £25,000 for the *Dare to Dream: Zero Leprosy in Ethiopia* project. There have been many good causes since, most recently the field hospital work in Kenya which has saved the sight of over 120 patients and is ongoing. I thank you all for the parts you have played.

Alas, in the twilight of the year much of the darkness has remained and indeed the situation in the Middle East has escalated exponentially. The horrific violence and increasing death toll brings sharply into focus the plight of those innocent families caught up in the atrocities. It echoes the war ravaged and bloody world our predecessors within the Order were all too familiar with, in which they strove valiantly to offer a lifeline to those afflicted by leprosy and to defend Christendom.

Advent is a time of hope. We must all hope and pray for a swift resolution to the conflict and for peace once more in the Middle East; but this time a peace upon which a genuine lasting settlement can be built.

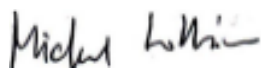
Advent is also a time of preparation. We must prepare ourselves, through prayer and reflection, to welcome Christ into our hearts and to contemplate what we can do individually to live out his message in our daily lives. We must also, as is our

duty, prepare to contribute to the vital hospitaller work the Order will undertake in the year to come.

We cannot be complacent. According to WHO data the global number of new cases of leprosy per year has increased since 2020. Whilst in part the fall in numbers in 2020 was due to less detection and reporting during the pandemic, the global number of new cases has not significantly declined in the last decade (with the greatest number of cases in the South East Asian region). There are still approximately 10,000 new cases a year of children with the disease, hundreds of whom have severe disfigurement as a result.

During this Christmastide, when we reflect on the Divine gift of God made man, and of the precious gifts offered to the baby Jesus by the mysterious Magi at the Epiphany, may they perhaps inspire us as we turn our efforts in the Grand Priory of England & Wales to considering how next month we may support our national appeal for World Leprosy Day 2024 and the children and families in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. May those gifts further inspire us throughout the year ahead to continue that generosity in whatever way we can: be it grand gifts like the Magi or, perhaps even more significantly, seemingly humble gifts like those brought by the shepherds to the vulnerable child in the stable. There is after all no gift too small for a child who through leprosy faces a lifetime of disfigurement and pain; or for a blind person to have their sight restored, or the sick to regain something of their health. We can help in however small a way to prepare these gifts.

May I wish you and your families the joy and peace of Christ this coming Christmas.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Michael Lothian'.

Michael Lothian  
Grand Prior