

Your Eminence, Your Grace, Your Excellencies, Knights, Dames, Members of the Order, Sirs, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is with the deepest humility, and a fair amount of surprise, that I stand before you today as your newly elected and invested Grand Prior of the United Kingdom Grand Priory, on this historic 700th anniversary of the Order of St George. *It is in itself a miracle that I survived the formalities without incident!*

This is not merely a personal honour. It is a profound collective moment that reaffirms our shared devotion to the timeless chivalric ideals of compassion, charity, and selfless service. These ideals can be captured in four simple yet powerful words: ***Non Sibi Sed Omnibus*** — Not for oneself, but for all.

I offer my sincere thanks to my proposer, my seconder, the Grand Council for placing their trust in me, and to every one of you whose commitment has brought us to this milestone. With your support, I pledge to lead our Order into a new era while remaining faithful to that established 700 years ago.

Reflecting on our path, we have already achieved much together. From the successful launch of our Symposia at the Honourable Artillery Company, fostering wider member engagement and attracting new recruits, to representing the Order at the Sandhurst football tournament alongside injured Ukrainian and British service personnel.

We have forged vital partnerships for delivering humanitarian aid in Ukraine and securing vital medical equipment. It is these efforts that embody the spirit of our Patron Saint, St George. As your former Hospitaller, I have seen first-hand the impact we can achieve when we work together, and I am now eager to build on that strong foundation.

The Order **continues** to make great progress. We have an increased international footprint with collaborating working relationships with our counterparts in the US and Canada. Our relationship with the Royal Hospital Chelsea has grown stronger, particularly through the renewed film club activity.

However, as with all worthwhile endeavours, it depends on the willing hands of our members. We are currently seeking further volunteers to help run this special club and bring joy and companionship to our veterans. If you feel called to get involved, please do reach out to me or Roger D’Elia — I am advised that the films are good and the popcorn is excellent.

This year ahead will focus squarely on **you**, our members. You will soon see some new activity. Instead of the annual Symposium, I will be launching the Order of St George Roadshow. I look forward, with genuine anticipation and only **mild** concern about my sat-nav, to travelling the length and breadth of the country, visiting every Commandery and outpost, meeting you in person, listening to your ideas, and shaping new initiatives together. Fear not: the Symposium will return, stronger and better informed by your feedback.

In the year ahead, my objectives remain clear and actionable. We will deepen our support for our UK Armed Forces veterans with renewed energy, further strengthening ties with the Royal Hospital Chelsea and our formal affiliation with the Princess of Wales Royal Regiment, championing evidence-based health and wellbeing initiatives that address psychological trauma, informed by the latest research on PTSD care, and driven by our membership.

We will continue and expand our vital humanitarian work overseas and among the Egyptian Copts, appointing dedicated officers to ensure our aid reaches those who need it most. At the same time, we will launch improved

communications initiatives, and member-led events to raise our visibility and welcome new members who share our values.

Looking forwards, my vision is clear: to position our Order as a modern beacon of chivalry, relevant to today's world, yet uncompromising in our foundational principles. I endeavour to bring a fresh leadership approach, streamlining our structures for greater efficiency, create member-led Special Interest Groups to develop new ideas, explore emerging themes, shape future symposia and drive meaningful projects in youth engagement, international aid, and community care.

But no vision is realised in isolation. In these uncertain and challenging times, the future of our Order rests in **your** hands. I invite each of you to step forward with courage and ownership. **Join** our working groups, bring **your** talents to our Special Interest Groups, champion projects that matter to you. Whether through fundraising, organising events, or building new partnerships, **your** contribution will innovate and sustain our efforts.

Let us set aside what no longer serves us by discontinuing redundant activities. We must empower one another through collaboration and embrace shared responsibility. Together, we will build a sustainable future for our Order so it will still be thriving in another 100 years and beyond.

I would like to pay warm tribute to those whose leadership and service have brought us to this significant milestone.

I thank His Excellency the Chevalier Stuart Notholt, immediate past Grand Prior, and Magisterium Officium of the Grand Magistracy, who has so effectively presided over the substantial growth in both our membership and our charitable activity. I acknowledge His Excellency the Chevalier Mark Haley, former Grand Chancellor of the UK Grand Priory, and member of the Grand

Magistry, for his 18 years of dedicated service to the Order; Mark will continue to share his vast expertise across the international landscape as a valued member of the Grand Magistry.

My appreciation goes to His Excellency the Chevalier Simon McIlwain, Grand Prior Emeritus and member of the Grand Magistry, who, as Chair of the associated charitable trust, continues to uphold and advance the legacy of the Order.

My particular thanks go to the Revd Jeremy Crossley and all our Deputy Chaplain Generals for making today's service so uplifting, to the choir and band under our Master of Music, Jonathan-lee Young-Brookes, to the cadets under Chevalier Larry Davis and to the 3rd Battalion the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment for providing the honour guard.

I also extend my gratitude to Dame Kimberley Tonner for organising our banquet, to the caterers for the tasty fare and to **everyone** who has worked so hard to make the past two days such a resounding success, **especially** those labouring tirelessly behind the scenes, thank you.

I offer my profound thanks to His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos for blessing us with his presence as our Patron, to His Grace the Bishop of Woolwich for his steadfast support as the official representative of the Diocese, and I send our very best wishes to His Grace the Lord Bishop of Southwark, the Rt Revd Christopher Chessun, without whose vision our valued partnership with the Diocese would not have been possible.

If I may draw your attention to the Investiture Order of Service, I am delighted to introduce my executive team who will serve alongside me on the Grand Council moving forward. Forgive me - we will be here all day if I introduce them individually but each and every member of the team brings tremendous

experience, dedication, and heart to their roles, and I know they will continue to serve our Order with distinction. I am sure you will join me in warmly welcoming them.

As a token of office, and in recognition of the important role they will play in the development of the UK Grand Priory, I would like to present each of my Deputy Grand Priors — each holding a specific portfolio of responsibility — with a red and white collarette.

This will be worn in addition to their existing rank at Order events and when representing me, for the duration of their term in office, to clearly signify their position within the management of the UK Grand Priory.

This has been a truly commemorative weekend, worthy of our 700 years of history. And the celebrations do not end here; they continue in Hungary over the coming days.

As Grand Prior of the U.K. Grand Priory, it gives me the honour to take this opportunity to offer one of our number an advancement to Knight Commander Expectant. This Knight has been a force for good in the U.K. Grand Priory and carried out his responsibilities here at home and internationally with the dedication and expertise he has applied throughout his professional life.

Just two examples of his commitment are the way he has represented our U.K. Grand Priory, often into the early hours of the morning, at international meetings involving our Grand Priory, that of the Americas and the Canadian Order of St George. He has also, been the driving force behind the planning and organisation of the U.K. contingent going to Hungary for the Order's Septcentenary and in the considerable liaison and planning that has had to take place with the Order in Hungary and with the Americas, including Canada.

I am, of course, referring to Prof the Chevalier Richard Parish CBE.

Richard please will you come forward and accept with our thanks a Knight Commander's neck Jewel so that you may, rightly, wear it from now on and then at the Septcentenary events in Hungary and thereafter until your investiture.

I look forward to formally welcoming you in due course and presenting you with your full regalia and brevet as a full Knight Commander.

Now, in the great words of a famous detective "*Just one more thing*" before we continue our celebrations this afternoon, I'd like to welcome two important people to our wider family. First, my mother, Sylvia Vaux-Edwards (also named Sylvia just to confuse everyone), my lifelong cheerleader, my biggest supporter, and the one who still claps the loudest for me.

And then there's my better half, Johnny Longbottom. Yes, that wonderful name is quite real — his parents clearly knew he was destined for greatness!

Many of you here will already know Johnny through his distinguished military service. As my Consort, and in deep gratitude for his steadfast and unwavering support...and for having to put up with me, I am honoured to bestow upon him the rank of Honorary Knight Commander of the Order.

Please join me in giving him the warmest, most enthusiastic welcome possible into our confraternity!

In closing, I am deeply enthusiastic about the journey ahead and I hope you are to. With St George's guidance, let us march onward with courage, compassion, and **unity**.

Thank you. May God bless our noble Order.

Please would those who are able, rise and join me in toasting the health and the bright future of the UK Grand Priory of the Order of St George.