

# CONSTITUTION OF THE ORDER OF SAINT JOHN OF JERUSALEM KNIGHTS HOSPITALLER.

O.S.J. FOR SHORT

## 1. Denomination and Tradition.

1) The ORDRE SOUVERAIN DE SAINT JEAN DE JERUSALEM, CHEVALIERS HOSPITALLES (hereinafter called “The Order”), O.S.J. for short, for all languages, designated in the use of languages, and to avoid confusion with other orders of the same stock:

ORDRE DES CHEVALIERS HOSPITALLERS

In German: HOSPITALITER RITTERORDEN

In English: ORDER OF THE KNIGHTS HOSPITALLER

is one of the independent branches resulting from the division of the Order of Saint–Jean-de-Jerusalem, also called over the centuries, Order of the Hospitallers, Order of Rhodes, Order of Malta, born of the Crusades, after the loss of its territories (the Island of Rhodes with its annexed Islands, the Leeward Isles, St Christopher, St Kitt and St Martin).

2) The O.S.J. bases its tradition since 1798 on:

- The two Russian Grand Priories (Orthodox and Catholic).
- The Grand Priory of Poland.
- The Commanderies of the Eastern Countries and the Christian Orient

Placed since that date and until 1917 under the HEREDITARY PROTECTION of the Head of the Imperial House of Romanoff and, as from the Russian revolution, after the precious relics of the Order had been sent – in particular – the arm of Saint Jean – and in accordance with the wish of the last Tsar Nicholas II, under that of the Royal House of Karadgeorgevitch.

3) This Constitution replaces the previous Constitutions, Customs and Codes, and is based on the Royal Charter given to the Order on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1963 in Paris by its Protector, His late Majesty King Peter II of Yugoslavia, Bailiff Grand Cross of Justice-hereditary.

## 2. Aim. Seat.

1) The Order is an International ecumenical chivalrous Christian community. The Principal aims of the OSJ, faithful to the various precepts taught by OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, are the charity and the defence of the Christian religion against atheism. True, too, to its traditions, the Order upholds the ideas of the free world and the rights of man as defined in

the United Nations Universal Declaration. It aspires to making a contribution to the formation of a strictly Christian human and spiritual elite. The community is made up of men and women who are distinguished by their origin, education, upbringing, capacities and worthy deeds. Whilst Taking the established and indispensable hierarchy into account, the OSJ adopts the principle of “Social equality” of all its Knights and Dames. (Ordinance, 2.1 0b, 1989)

2) The Sovereign Council of the OSJ chooses the means to achieve these aims. It designates the Seat of the Order and the seat of its central administration.

### **3. Juridical status. Arms.**

1) The Order is Sovereign and subject to International Law in relation to its states since the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The juridical position has not changed de jure, but the facto since 1798, that is why the Order has been provisionally endowed with the juridical status of an International non Government Organization (NGO), sustained by the Knights and Dames of the Order throughout the world.

2) The Arms of the Order represent on a red escutcheon a regular silver cross placed on a Maltese Cross (an eight point cross), also in silver, surmounted by the closed crown of the Order, the whole placed on a double-headed black eagle.

3) The flag of the Order shows the white cross of Malta on a red background. The colours of the OSJ are red and white. Its device is faithful to tradition: PRO FIDE, PRO UTILITATE HOMINUM. The commemorative day is June the 24<sup>th</sup>, St John’s Day.

### **4. Finances.**

1) The resources of the Order consist of the Knights, and members subscriptions, subsidies, donations and legacies with or without special attribution and income from its possessions and properties.

2) The financial responsibility of the Order is limited to its own possessions.

3) The Sovereign Council appoints professional auditors, who must not be Knights or members of the Order.

4) The financial year coincides with the calendar year.

5) An annual oblation is assessed at (& 17) for each member of a unit to be sent to the treasurer of the Order. This is subject to review by the Little Council. Failure to pay this oblation will be referred to the Little Council for disciplinary action, which may include censure, fine and or loss of privilege. A Capitation fee of (&60) for each new Knight or Dame of Honour is assessed, which is sent to the treasurer of the Order.

### **5. The Hereditary Protector.**

1) The Head of the Royal House of KaradGeorgevitch is the Hereditary Protector of the OSJ. His role is fixed by the venerable traditions and customs of the order.

If for any reason the Hereditary Protector of the OSJ is unwilling or unable to act in that Capacity, then the Sovereign Council in a meeting assembled, may, by a majority of votes of members eligible to attend and voting in person or by proxy, invite a suitable person To assume the office of Protector of the Order upon such terms and conditions as may be Determined.

2) Only the Protector has the privilege to appointing Hereditary Knights of the Order.

3) The Grand Conservator of the Order (cf.7. 1B) is the permanent representative of the Protector vis-à-vis the Order and the President of the Council of His Majesty the Protector.

4) The Council of the Protector (the inner Council of the Crown) is composed of the Grand Conservator, two other Bailiffs of the Order, chosen by His Majesty, a dignitary representing the Grand Priory of America, and three Knight Commanders appointed by the Protector on the proposal by the Grand Priory of America and with respect to the Knight Commanders, on the proposal of the Grand Priory of America and with regards to the Knight Commander, on the proposal of the Little Council.

## **6. The Grand Priory of America.**

1) The Grand Priory of America enacted its own Constitution on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1912. It has been affiliated to the Order since its foundation in New York in 1908.

2) The Grand Priory is governed autonomously, but in concert with the Grand Master and in harmony with the directives of His late Majesty the Protector.

3) The area of jurisdiction of the Grand Priory covers; the United States of America, Canada the Central American States, the South American States.

4) The Sovereign Council and the Little Council are represented vis-à-vis the Grand Priory, by the Grand Chancellor, a dignitary who resides in America and is an auxiliary member of the Sovereign Council.

5) Membership of the Grand Priory by persons who have no permanent domicile in the area of jurisdiction of the Grand Priory or who are not citizens of a State in that area would now no longer be possible except by exceptional decision of the Little Council.

## **7. The Sovereign Council.**

1) Sovereign Council is the custodian of the Sovereignty of the Order. It is the legislative body of the OSJ. It is composed of the following:

2) The Grand master, its President

The six Bailiffs-Conventuels (by order of tradition):

The Grand Commander (Interior, Finance), The Grand Marshall (Herald, Ceremonies), The Grand Hospitaller (social and charitable works), The Grand Conservator ( the Protector's Delegate), The Grand Councillor (Information and Foreign Affairs), The Grand Bailiff. The most senior in rank of the six Bailiffs-Conventuels is automatically the first vice-president of the Sovereign Council and the first substitute of the Grand Master. The Bailiffs-Conventuels are chosen from the 20 Bailiffs of the Order, all members of Sovereign Council, by the Council itself, which decides by a straight majority vote; only the Grand Conservator is appointed by the Protector

The remaining Bailiffs (with the exception of those of the Grand Priory of America) and the Prior in Office who are not Bailiffs. The most senior in rank of the Bailiffs is automatically the second vice-president of the Council and the second substitute to the Grand Master – all regular members of Sovereign Council.

The Council establishes its own rules. Except for 7-1A, 10-1 and 5, decisions are reached by a straight majority vote, with the president having a casting vote in the event of a tie- up. The decisions are valid if at least a third of the full members are present and at least two thirds are represented.

- 3) The Council has the power of delegating part of its powers to the Little Council.
- 4) The Council shall be convened by the Grand Master, the Little Council or a third of the Bailiffs.

## **The Little Council**

- 1) The Petit Conseil is the executive organ of the OSJ. Petit Conseil is composed of the six Bailiffs-Conventuels. Its role is that of Central Administration (Government) of the Order and manages current business.
- 2) The Order is validly committed towards third parties by the signatures of two Bailiffs-Conventuels.
- 3) The Little Council establishes its own rules.
- 4) The Little Council has the power to appoint Assistants(=lieutenants) for each of its members.
- 5) The Little Council is presided in turn by one of its members.
- 6) The affairs of the Grand Priory of America are not within the competence of the Little Council.
- 7) At every Sovereign Council meeting the officers shall be elected or confirmed.

8) The little Council is empowered to fill any appointed office made vacant by death, illness, resignation or any other incapacity for a period until Sovereign Council is reconvened.

9) The Office of Registrar General is created to be the repository of the archives, rolls of membership and all other records of the Order. He/ she is to fulfil any other duties entrusted to him/her by Sovereign Council, and will serve at the pleasure of the Little Council who will appoint him. (Statute 4, 8.9, 1983)

10) All new members must be registered with the Registrar, and all persons claiming titles of nobility must be screened by the King at Arms. All Diplomas must be signed by the Grand Master and the Grand Prior or Prior of jurisdiction. The numbers of the Diplomas are to be furnished by the registrar, who will number them, sending copies to the Grand Master for his approval or disapproval. Those persons claiming titles of nobility will have their applications sent by the Registrar to the King of Arms for investigation as to authenticity of their rank before being sent to the Grand master. The Secretary-Registrar is to draw up a standard application form, which is to be used by all. (Statute 3, 8.10, 1983)

11) Each member of the Little Council is precluded from holding any Office in the Order during his three year term as such member. (Ordinance 2, 8 11, 2001)

12) The King at Arms shall serve under the Grand marshal.

## **9. The Supreme Court**

1) The Sovereign Council appoints three judges and two auxiliary judges - from among the Knights and Dames of Justice or of grace of the Order (preferably jurists who make up the Court. Their term of office is three years. Judges and auxiliary judges may stand for re-election. Judges and their auxiliaries must not be part of any other service or council of the Order.

2) Subject to the Constitution the Court establishes its own Rules and Procedures.

3) The following come within the competency of the Court:

a) Observances of the prescriptions of this Constitution, the laws and of ordinances of the Order.

b) Judgement of any differences between dignitaries of the Order, with the exception of Bailiffs, who for their own court if needs be.

c) Legal matters or ones of honour which are submitted to its judgement by the Sovereign Council or the Grand Prior of America.

d) Final verdicts on decisions reached by the courts of Grand Priorities or Priorities.

4) The Grand Master or his substitute has the power of pardon in the last instance.

5) All of the courts; Priory, Supreme and Bailiff's Court, when making judgements may discipline members as follows.

- a) Expulsion from the Order
- b) Demotion in Rank
- c) Removal and or exclusion from office.

## 10. The Grand Master.

1) The Grand master shall be elected on the resolution of a meeting of Sovereign Council comprising the majority of two thirds of the votes of members/ eligible to attend and voting in person or by proxy and shall remain in office for so long as he shall enjoy the confidence of a majority of the members of Sovereign Council for the time being. It is incumbent upon the Grand Master:

- a) To appoint Bailiffs

- with the approval of and on the proposal of the Little Council (with the exception of nominations for the area of jurisdiction of the Grand Priory of America). The number of Bailiffs is strictly limited to twenty, on a proposal by and with the approval of the Council of the Grand Priory of America for the area of jurisdiction of that Grand Priory. Their number is strictly limited to 15. **Any Bailiff of the age of 80 years or above, who holds no Office in the Order, should be approached by the Grand Prior or Prior of the area concerned to request that he accepts the position of Bailiff Emeritus. On such acceptance, the Bailiff Emeritus will retain his existing status and rank in the Order, but will relinquish his right to vote at meetings of the Order (including Sovereign Council meetings) unless he be personally present at such meeting. Upon receipt of such an invitation the Bailiff concerned has the right to decline the invitation to become a Bailiff Emeritus.**  
(Ordinance3,10.1a, 2001)

- b) Appointing Knight and **Dame** Commanders following proposals by the competent unit and with the approval of the Little Council, respectively for the Grand Priory of America and its Council.
- c) Appointing members of the High Courts of the Grand Priorities and Pories on the proposal of the Little Council, respectively for the Council of the Grand Priory of America.
- d) Appointing members of the Ecclesiastical Council of the Order with the approval of the Little Council.
- e) Appointing Knights and Dames of Justice ideally, though not necessarily if otherwise in the best interests of the Order, once and by June 24<sup>th</sup> in each year, on the proposal of the Little Council, respectively of the Council of the Grand Priory of America. Provided that nothing in this sub-clause shall prevent Sovereign Council from making such appointment where considered appropriate and in the best interests of the Order nor from delegating such

power to the Little Council, but in that event such power shall only be exercised with the prior approval of the Grand Master.

f) Appointing Knights and Dames of Grace, motu proprio.

2) The Grand Master has the right:

a) To withhold a Little Council decision having the nature of an ordinance for 15 days and to ask for it to be put to the Sovereign Council if he does not approve it;

b) To withhold a law or ordinance of the Sovereign Council for 8 days if such has been passed despite his objection provided notice of such withholding pursuant to this article is formally given immediately after the passing of such law or ordinance.

3) The Secretariat General of the Grand Master is managed by the Grand Master's Secretary General who is a Bailiff or a Knight Commander and is appointed by the Grand Master with the approval of the Little Council.

4) The substitutes for the Grand Master are automatically first of all the First Vice-President of the Sovereign Council and secondly the second Vice President of the Sovereign Council (cf..7 B.C)

5) Depending on the circumstances, **the Office of the Grand Master** (Ordinance 7, 10.5, 1989) can also be ensured, by a Sovereign Council's decision, by a Lieutenant Grand Master elected with full powers by the Sovereign Council by a majority of two thirds of the full members, but for a limited period, or by a Council of Regents. The latter is automatically formed after the death,

Renunciation, incapacity or unavailability of a Grand Master for whatsoever cause. The two Vice-Presidents of the Council and a third Bailiff, appointed by the Protector form part of the Council of Regents.

**6) The post of Advocate General is created to carry out such duties as may be designated to him by the Grand Master and the Grand Commander. The Advocate**

**General will be appointed on an annual basis by the Grand Master.** (Statute 5, 10.6, 1983)

## 11. The Provinces of the Order

1) The Provinces of the Order, no longer corresponding to the languages of former times, are the Pories which are created by a decision of the Little Council with the approval of the Grand Master.

2) The Pories are directed by a Prior chosen from among the Knights of Justice and elected by the Priory Chapter and confirmed by the Little Council; and the Officers of the Council of the Priory which is composed of the Vice-Chancellor, the Superintendent, the Hospitaller and the Herald, also elected by the Chapter with the approval of the Prior.

**3) The Prior and Officers of any Priory within the territorial jurisdiction of a Grand Priory may be dismissed from office by a simple per capita majority resolution of a meeting of the Council of that Grand Priory duly convened and held. Provided that no such resolution shall be effective unless and until ratified by the Little Council and provided further that in the case of a Grand Priory and the Officers of a Grand Priory they shall only be dismissed from office by a simple majority resolution of a Grand Priory Chapter, but subject to ratification as aforesaid. (Ordinance5, 11.3, 1989)**

4) The Priory Chapter is the general assembly of the unit. It is composed of all the Knights and Dames of the Order domiciled in the area of jurisdiction of the Priory. The Chapter is presided by the Prior. The Vice-Prior and substitute for the Prior is the most senior ranked Commander of the unit. The Chapter meets at least once a year, acquaints itself with the report on the activities of the Priory and approves its accounts and budget. It deliberates on all matters of fundamental importance put before it either by the Priory administration or a department. The Chapter appoints the Priory Court of Honour and decides on the formation of subordinate Commanderies. The Chapter has the right- without going through the official channels- to make recommendations or requests direct to the Little Council or the Sovereign Council. **At any Grand Priory Chapter meeting all members (including ecclesiastics and dames) of that Grand Priory shall be eligible to attend in person or submit proxy votes.** (Ordinance6, 11.4, 1989)

5) The Little Council has the power to create Grand Priors Bailiwicks and to subordinate several Priors to them or to create independent Commanderies.

**6) Each Grand Priory shall be directed by a Grand Prior who shall be appointed by the Grand Master in consultation with Petit Conseil. Nominations for the position of Grand Prior in a particular Grand Priory shall be submitted to the Grand Master by the Priors which constitute the Grand Priory concerned and by the Grand Priory itself.** (Ordinance1, 11.6, 2001)

## 12. The Knights

The Knights of the Order are divided as follows:

### 1) Knights of Justice.

They must belong to the order for at least 5 years and acquired very important merits for the community (cf.10.1e). When voting they are entitle to ten votes.

Grades: Bailiff (=Grand Cross of Justice), Knight Commander, Knight.

### 2) Knights of Grace.

They must have belonged to the Order for at least 3 years and have acquired important merits (cf. 10.1 f) When voting they are entitled to five votes.

Grades: Knight Commander, Knight.

### 3) Knights of Honour.



They must belong to a distinguish family as well as to one of the Christian denominations, and have an excellent reputation. They are introduced to the competent Unit by two guarantor Knights and are admitted as soon as possible after having participated as candidates for a period of two months in the work of the Order. They are appointed by the competent Prior; the Grand Cross by the Little Council.

Grades: Grand Cross, who is entitled to three votes when voting takes place, and Knights who have one vote.

#### **4) Knights of Merit (also called by some Honorary Members)**

**They must belong to a distinguish family as well as one of a non-Christian denomination and have an excellent reputation. They shall be introduced to the competent unit in the same manner of Knights of Honour but subject to the prior approval of the Grand master. Further they shall be graded as to Knight of Merit (KMSJ); Knight Commander of merit (KCMSJ) and Knight Grand Cross of Merit (GCMSJ). Knights of Merit shall not be enfranchised nor eligible to hold any office within the Order or to vote. (Ordinance 4, 12.4, 1989)**

##### **1. The Ecclesiastics of the Order.**

1) In view of the supra-confessional nature of the Order, members of its clergy serve the OSJ within the context of its units. Ecclesiastics are admitted into the Order as Knights of Justice, Knights of Grace and Knights of Honour, but they cannot be members of Sovereign Council nor the Little Council, nor may they be appointed Bailiff or Knight Commander, Ecclesiastic Knights who are promoted to Knight of Justice, Knight of Grace or Grand Cross of Honour bear the title of Prelate of the Order.

2) On the other hand the Grand master has the power to form Ecclesiastical Council of the Order with the approval of the Little Council (cf. 10.1d). Such a Council will be composed of representatives of the big Christian denominations represented in the Knighthood of the Order and will establish its own rules.

##### **1. Dames of the Order.**

**Dames of the order shall have equal rights, privileges, duties and constrains as Knights of the Order and, as their Rank may determine be entitled to hold any office within the Order. Dames shall therefore have the right to be elected or appointed to any office including Grand Magisterium, Grand Priories, Priories and Commanderies. (Ordinance 14. 2005)**

**Dames of the Order shall be divided into the following classes:**

##### **(1) Dame of Justice**

**They must have belonged to the Order for at least five years and have rendered significant services to the community. They shall be entitled to ten votes at meetings and graded as to Dame of Justice and Dame Commander of Justice or Grand dame of Justice (Equivalent to Bailiff).**

**(2) Dame of Grace.**

**They must have belonged to the Order for at least three years and have rendered significant services to the community. They shall be entitled to five votes at meetings and graded as to Dame of Grace and Dame Commander of Grace.**

**(3) Dame of Honour.**

**They must belong to a distinguished family as well as to the one of the Christian denominations. They shall be introduced to the competent unit by two sponsor Knights and / or Dames and are admitted as soon as possible after having participated as candidates for a period of two months in the work of the Order.**

**They shall be appointed by the competent Prior and entitled to one vote at meetings.**

**(4) Grand Dame. (equivalent to Bailiff)**

**They shall be appointed by the Little Council on the proposal of the competent Prior. They shall be entitled to ten votes at meetings.**

**Dames of any class or grade shall be entitled to hold any office within the Order and to be appointed head of any unit of the Order or to any office within Grand**

**Magisterium.** (Ordinance 1, art 0.13, 2005)

15. Esquires, Donats, Serving males and females of the Order.

- 1) Young men between 18 and 23 may be admitted to the Order as Esquires. They take part in the Chapter but do not vote. They may be received as Knights of Honour after reaching the age of 23, without further formality.
- 2) Persons working for the Order as officials or superiors on a mobile unit may be admitted to the Order as Donats by the competent Priory.
- 3) The Serving Brothers of the Order are appointed by the competent Prior or Commander.
- 4) The Serving Sisters of the Order are appointed by the competent Prior or Commander if the unit has services directed by Dames of the Order.

16. **Final point.**

**The provisions of this Constitution may be revoked, supplemented or altered by a resolution, submitted to members of Sovereign Council at least six months prior to a meeting of Sovereign Council and passed at a meeting of Sovereign Council by at least 90% of those members present and voting.** (Ordinance 1, art 16, 1989/ amended by Statute 2 1998) (Statutes and Ordinances do not come under the above as they only require a 51% majority and no notice is required)

**Since 1983 at all Sovereign Council Meetings, the following resolution has been tabled and approved by unanimous vote:**

**“ in all cases of disagreement or dispute the original French Constitution without alterations as signed and given to the Order by HM the late King Peter II, prevails.”**