



Knights of Saint Mary of Bethlehem

New Year Bulletin, 2026.



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



'And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares'

Isaiah 2:4



A New Year Message from the Grand Prior

My dear fellow Knights and Dames,

As we begin this New Year, a season of renewal, purpose, and hope, I extend my warmest greetings to you and your families. January offers us a moment to pause, reflect, and recommit ourselves to the sacred work entrusted to our Order.

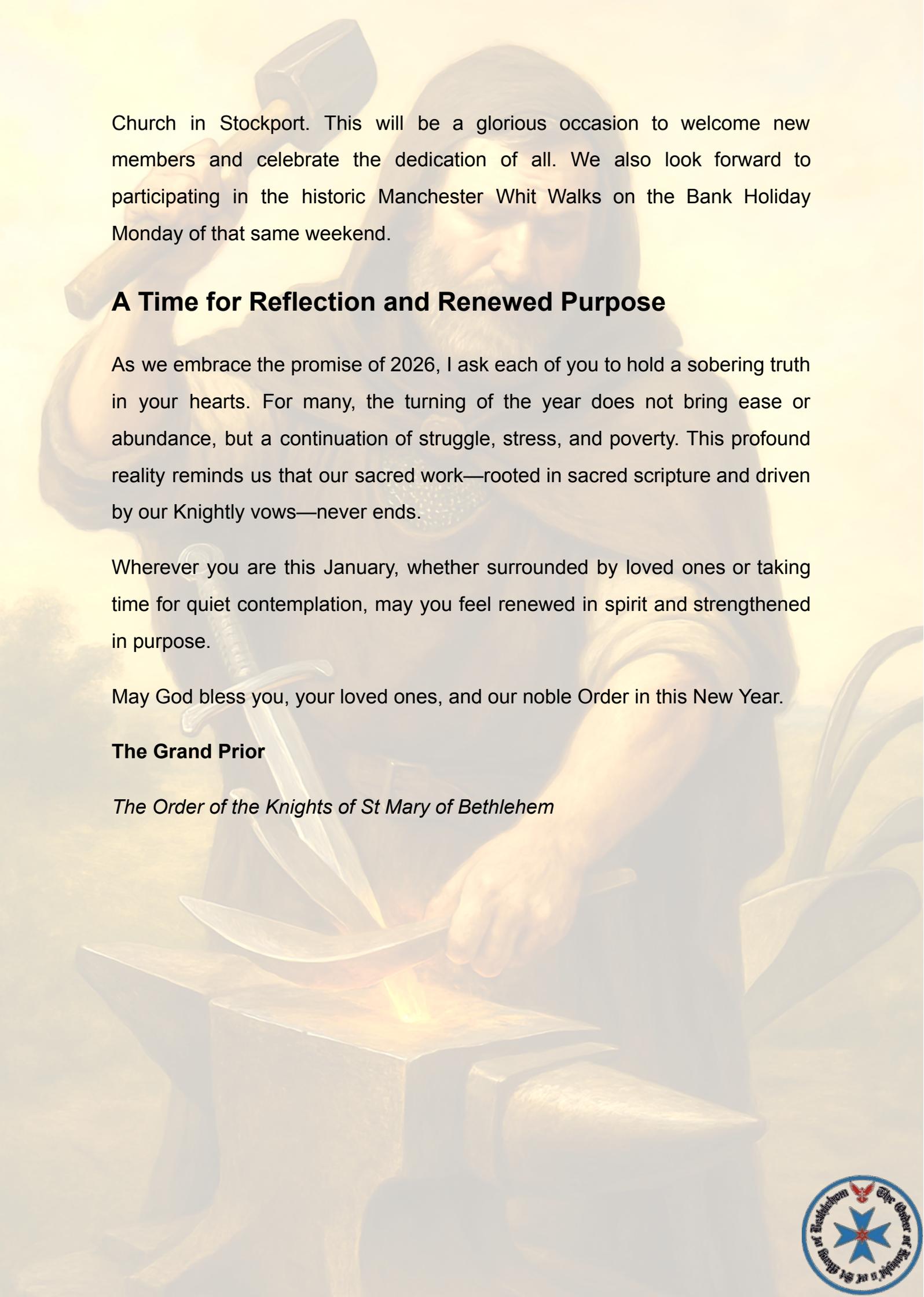
The past year has been one of exceptional commitment and notable achievements, showcasing the true spirit of service that defines us. I wish to particularly commend the tireless efforts of all involved in our local community outreach. The successful Care Pack Drops in Stockport, Nottingham, and Bognor Regis brought tangible relief and comfort to many who needed it most, demonstrating the depth of our compassion and resolve.

We also upheld the grand traditions of our Order through our public presence. Who could forget the solemnity and camaraderie we shared during the Whit Walks, the inspiring *Light the Way* event over the May Bank Holiday weekend, and the walk around the loch earlier in the year with our members in Scotland. These gatherings were powerful affirmations of our faith and our commitment to the communities we serve. A truly significant milestone was also achieved when we formally signed an Act of Friendship with the OMCTH, strengthening our bonds and expanding the reach of our shared charitable goals.

Looking Ahead to 2026

As we step into this New Year, we must build on the strong foundation we have laid together. The months ahead hold immense opportunities for further service and growth. Our immediate focus will be on preparing for our next great gathering: the Investiture on Saturday, May 23rd, 2026, at St Mary's





Church in Stockport. This will be a glorious occasion to welcome new members and celebrate the dedication of all. We also look forward to participating in the historic Manchester Whit Walks on the Bank Holiday Monday of that same weekend.

A Time for Reflection and Renewed Purpose

As we embrace the promise of 2026, I ask each of you to hold a sobering truth in your hearts. For many, the turning of the year does not bring ease or abundance, but a continuation of struggle, stress, and poverty. This profound reality reminds us that our sacred work—rooted in sacred scripture and driven by our Knightly vows—never ends.

Wherever you are this January, whether surrounded by loved ones or taking time for quiet contemplation, may you feel renewed in spirit and strengthened in purpose.

May God bless you, your loved ones, and our noble Order in this New Year.

The Grand Prior

The Order of the Knights of St Mary of Bethlehem



Strengthening Fellowship and Expanding Our Mission: A Year of Carrying Light into the Community.

Among the many moments that shaped the past year for the Knights of Saint Mary of Bethlehem, several stand out as powerful expressions of our shared identity: the reflective walk around the loch with our members in Scotland, the formal signing of an Act of Friendship with the OMCTH, and the compassionate Care Pack Drops delivered in Stockport, Nottingham, and Bognor Regis. Together, these events reveal an Order that is growing in unity, deepening in purpose, and extending its reach to those most in need.

Walking the Loch: Fellowship in the Scottish Highlands

Earlier in the year, members of the Order gathered in Scotland for a contemplative walk around the loch. What began as a simple gathering became a profound moment of fellowship. The quiet rhythm of walking together, the open landscape, and the shared conversations created a space for reflection and renewal. It reminded us that our mission is not only about the service we offer outwardly, but also about the bonds we nurture within our own fellowship. In that peaceful setting, our unity was strengthened, and our commitment to one another reaffirmed.

An Act of Friendship: Deepening Bonds with the OMCTH

A truly significant milestone followed when the Order formally signed an Act of Friendship with the OMCTH. This agreement represents a deliberate step toward deeper cooperation, shared charitable action, and a united vision for the future. By joining hands with another respected Order, we expand our



capacity to serve, broaden our charitable reach, and affirm our belief that compassion is most powerful when it is shared. This partnership stands as a testament to our values of humility, unity, and service.

Carrying Light Into Communities: Care Pack Drops Across Three Regions

Alongside these moments of fellowship and partnership, the Order continued its practical mission of compassion through Care Pack Drops in Stockport, Nottingham, and Bognor Regis. These initiatives were simple in form but profound in impact, offering warmth, dignity, and reassurance to individuals facing hardship.

Stockport: Strengthening Local Bonds

In Stockport, the Care Pack Drop built on our longstanding presence in the community. Volunteers worked closely with local outreach groups to reach rough sleepers, families in crisis, and individuals in temporary accommodation. The heartfelt conversations shared during the distribution reaffirmed our belief that service is most powerful when it is personal and grounded in genuine human connection.

Nottingham: Compassion in the Midlands

In Nottingham, members of the Order gathered to support individuals facing homelessness and food insecurity. The day was marked not only by the giving of essential items but by the dignity and respect shown to each person encountered. Volunteers reflected on the privilege of standing alongside those in need, even briefly, offering both practical help and compassionate presence.



Bognor Regis: Care and Connection on the Coast

In Bognor Regis, the Care Pack Drop addressed the unique challenges of a coastal community where isolation and hidden poverty are often overlooked. The support offered brought comfort and stability to individuals living on the margins. Alongside this, the *Walk the Light* event created a space for companionship, conversation, and solidarity—reminding us that service is not only about what we give, but how we walk with others.

A Year Marked by Unity, Compassion, and Purpose

Taken together, these events—our walk in Scotland, the Act of Friendship with the OMCTH, and the Care Pack Drops across three regions—paint a clear picture of an Order alive with purpose. They show that our mission is not confined to ceremonies or statements, but lived out in fellowship, partnership, and compassionate action.

As we look toward the opportunities of 2026, these moments stand as markers of who we are becoming:



Woodbank Hall: A Long-Term Vision for Supporting Homeless Military Service Personnel

Woodbank Hall is now at the centre of a major long-term project to support homeless Military service personnel, offering them a clear pathway back into stability, purpose, and independence. This is a multi-year commitment, not a temporary intervention, built on the belief that those who have served their country deserve dignity, opportunity, and hope.

The redevelopment will transform the historic building into a dedicated centre providing safe accommodation, long-term retraining, tailored employment pathways, mental-health support, and a community environment that fosters belonging and resilience. Because of the project's scale—estimated at £5 million—funding is being developed through a blended approach involving local government, veteran charities, heritage bodies, private partners, and community stakeholders.

Such an ambitious vision requires careful conservation planning, phased redevelopment, multi-year funding cycles, and strong partnerships. The aim is not simply to restore a building, but to create a lasting institution that will support service personnel for decades to come.

When complete, Woodbank Hall will stand as a restored heritage landmark, a centre of excellence for veteran support, and a powerful symbol of Stockport's commitment to those who served. The next steps include finalising architectural plans, securing long-term funding, establishing training partnerships, and preparing the site for phased development. The journey is significant, but the purpose is greater still: to build a place where service personnel can rebuild their lives with dignity and hope for the long term.



Investiture, May 23rd, 2026.

St Mary's Church, Stockport.

The Investiture in May 2026 will stand as the central moment of our year, a solemn and uplifting occasion at St Mary's Church in Stockport where new Knights and Dames will be welcomed into the Order and existing members will reaffirm their commitment to service, compassion, and faith.

Surrounding the Investiture, a full weekend of activity is planned to strengthen fellowship and deepen our presence within the community. On the Saturday, members will gather for the ceremony itself, followed by time together to celebrate the dedication and achievements of the Order. The weekend will continue into Monday with our participation in the historic Manchester Whit Walks, where our public witness—so powerfully demonstrated in previous years—will once again affirm our values of unity, service, and visible faith. Together, these events mark not only a highlight of 2026 but a reaffirmation of the Order's mission as we step forward into a year of opportunity and growth.



Overview of the Charity Sector Relevant to the Knights of Saint Mary of Bethlehem

The Knights of Saint Mary of Bethlehem operate within a distinctive and historically rich segment of the UK charity landscape: faith-based social action, community outreach, and heritage-rooted service organisations. This sector blends spiritual identity with practical service, relying on volunteers, local partnerships, and public presence to support vulnerable individuals and strengthen community cohesion.

What Is Working Well

1. Strong Community-Level Impact

Faith-based organisations consistently demonstrate high effectiveness in hyper-local outreach, often reaching individuals who fall outside the scope of statutory services [1]. Activities such as care-pack distribution, pastoral support, and visible participation in civic events build trust and provide tangible relief.

2. High Volunteer Commitment and Identity

Orders with a clear ethos and ritual structure—such as the Knights of Saint Mary of Bethlehem—benefit from unusually strong volunteer loyalty. Research shows that volunteers in faith-based settings demonstrate higher retention and deeper personal investment than the general volunteer population [2].



3. Public Trust and Moral Authority

Faith-rooted charities continue to enjoy strong public confidence, with surveys showing they are perceived as authentic, values-driven, and community-focused [3]. This trust enhances the Order's ability to engage the public and form partnerships.

What Is Not Working

1. Fragmentation and Limited Coordination

Small faith-based groups often operate independently, leading to duplicated efforts and missed opportunities for collaboration. Sector analyses highlight that fragmentation reduces efficiency and limits the ability to scale impact [4].

2. Outdated Infrastructure and Administrative Systems

Many heritage-based organisations rely on informal processes, paper records, or ad-hoc planning. This makes it difficult to demonstrate impact, apply for grants, or meet modern governance expectations [5].

3. Volunteer Burnout and Leadership Bottlenecks

A small number of highly committed individuals often carry the majority of the workload. Without structured delegation, succession planning, or training pathways, organisations become vulnerable to burnout and leadership gaps [6].



Top Three Problems Facing This Sector

1. Sustainability and Organisational Capacity

Faith-based orders frequently rely on limited funding streams and small volunteer bases. Sector reports consistently identify sustainability as the most pressing challenge for small charities [7].

2. Visibility and Relevance in a Secularising Society

Younger generations often lack familiarity with chivalric orders or faith-based service traditions. Without modern communication strategies, organisations risk becoming invisible or misunderstood [8].

3. Professional Standards and Accountability

The charity sector increasingly demands measurable outcomes, safeguarding compliance, and transparent governance. Many small orders lack the administrative capacity to meet these expectations consistently [9].

How These Problems Can Be Solved

1. Build Sustainable Structures

- Develop clear volunteer roles and responsibilities.
- Introduce simple but robust governance frameworks.
- Create annual planning cycles and impact reports.
- Form partnerships with churches, councils, and other charities to share resources.



Impact: A resilient organisation capable of growth without overburdening its core members.

2. Modernise Communication and Public Presence

- Use social media to highlight service, not ceremony.
- Produce concise explanations of the Order's mission and relevance.
- Engage younger volunteers through schools, parishes, and community events.
- Maintain a visible presence at civic and faith-based gatherings.

Impact: A contemporary public identity that honours tradition while engaging new audiences.

3. Adapt to appropriate professional methods

- Implement safeguarding, data protection, and volunteer training.
- Track outreach numbers and outcomes.
- Use simple digital tools for communication and record-keeping.
- Offer structured training in community outreach and event organisation.

Impact: Greater credibility, improved grant eligibility, and enhanced public trust.

The Knights of Saint Mary of Bethlehem stand within a sector rich in tradition, moral authority, and community impact. Yet the challenges of sustainability, visibility, and professionalisation require deliberate action. By strengthening organisational structures, modernising communication, and adopting light-touch professional standards, the Order can flourish as a model of faith-rooted service in the 21st century.



Conclusion: Strength for the Journey Ahead

As we look across all that has been achieved—from the compassion shown in our Care Pack Drops, to the fellowship of our public witness, to the long-term vision unfolding at Woodbank Hall—it becomes clear that the Knights of Saint Mary of Bethlehem stand at a moment of quiet but profound strength. Our Order has never been defined by numbers or grandeur, but by the steadfast hearts of those who serve with humility, dignity, and faith. This past year has shown that when we act together, guided by the precedent of Hospitaller Orders and bound by our vows, we can bring light into places of hardship and hope into the lives of those who feel forgotten.

The year ahead will ask much of us. The Investiture in May will renew our fellowship and welcome new Knights and Dames into our shared mission. The Whit Walks will once again allow us to stand visibly for unity and compassion. And the long-term transformation of Woodbank Hall will call us to patience, perseverance, and vision as we help shape a future of dignity for those who have served their country.

Yet we do not step into 2026 with uncertainty—we step forward with purpose. The foundations we have laid together are strong. Our identity is clear. Our mission is alive. And our Order, rooted in centuries of service, continues to grow in courage, compassion, and resolve.

May we carry this spirit into every act of kindness, every moment of fellowship, and every challenge that lies ahead.

And may the Order of the Knights of Saint Mary of Bethlehem continue to stand as a beacon of hope, mercy, and steadfast service in the year to come.

The Grand Prior.



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