

Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries Ireland A MPJP Case Study

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This paper provides a brief case study of the MPJP, Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries, which operates in dioceses across Ireland, England and Malawi. This paper is one of six case studies produced by the ACU Inclusive Governance in a Synodal Church (IGSC) project in 2025.

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Process of establishing MPJP

Our vision is based on the vision of our Founder, Saint John of God, who said that when we do good to others, we also do good for ourselves.

John brought all who were in need, the sick, the poor, the homeless, the dispossessed, and provided them with shelter, food and healing, even though his own resources were very limited. The Saint John of God Order, from the time of its foundation in the 16th century, has striven to be faithful to this vision of outreach to those most in need through its health services on all five continents.

Hospitality is the value which underpins our vision and our other values.

Hospitality is openness to all, treating all, regardless of race, gender, religion or ability, with compassion and respect.²

The importance of hospitality in the charism of the Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God in Ireland³ can be traced back to the example of their founder and becomes a defining characteristic of their ministries. The Brothers say that they often saw the people they supported as being like their family because of the constant and long-term contact involved in the provision of accommodation and support of people with lifelong disabilities or long-term illnesses. Br Don said “So all our lives we’ve been close to the sick and the marginalised with disability, or mental illness and the elderly. They’ve been our family and that’s the way we’ve always seen it.”⁴

The Brothers have witnessed lay people being attracted to their way of working with people. These lay people find a resonance with the Brothers’ vision of opening oneself to encounter and care for the other and finding that you receive at least as much as you give.

The centrality of “the way of working” as distinct from “the institutional works” was on the mind of the Brothers when they decided to found a MPJP. Br Don said “The motivation was to ensure, insofar as one can ensure anything into the future, that the work of Saint John of God will continue as a ministry of the Church, with or without the brothers. To continue the work of Saint John of God in the in the way we always did it, and even better

² “Vision and Values” Saint John of God Brothers West European Province, accessed March 20, 2025, <https://sjogbrothers.eu/vision-and-values/>

³ Hereafter referred to as the Brothers.

⁴ Interview with author, March 18, 2025

than we did it.” Having witnessed lay people as sharers of their vision and way of working, the Brothers had confidence that this approach would continue.

The Brothers from France arrived in Ireland in 1879 and England in 1880. Their main ministries were assisting people with a disability and people experiencing mental illness. The Brothers also sent members to establish foundations in USA, Australia, Canada, South Korea, Zambia and in 1993 to Malawi.

Since Vatican II, the Brothers have undertaken considerable change “... such as the way they dressed, their manner of community prayer, the community timetable and its daily routine, and the commencement of new apostolic works where new needs in society had emerged; and the return by significant numbers to lay life, marriage and families.”⁵ The Brothers also made significant changes to their ministries: opening up ministries to girls and women (previously only assisting males); separating the role of Superior of the Brother’s community from the role of ministry head (previously they were combined); employing more lay people with professional skills; appointing lay people to positions of leadership and governance in ministries (with Brothers as their employees); incorporating ministries as civil companies and charities; and the Brothers adopting a “partnership model” that embraced as colleagues the lay people who shared their charism of hospitality.⁶

The gradual changes described above meant that the Brothers were open hear about the new canonical expression “Ministerial Public Juridic Person” in publications of the Catholic Health Association of USA. In the early years of the new century the Brothers in Ireland considered four options in response to their declining membership in Ireland and England:

1. Bring in Brothers from Provinces with greater numbers (e.g., South Korea, Africa, Poland) for them to staff/lead ministries. This option was rejected for local and international reasons. Locally, there were many suitable lay co-workers in Ireland and England. Making use of these lay people was seen as respecting their engagement with the charism and honouring their rights as Catholics to participate in Church ministries. Internationally, the Brothers were needed in their own countries to support and spread the charism and ministries.
2. The Irish Province could join with one or more other Provinces. This initially considered the four anglophone Provinces: Ireland, England, USA and Oceania. A second proposal was to combine the Provinces of Ireland, England and France. In 2010, the Irish and English Provinces combined but this was not considered to be a solution to the need for ongoing sponsorship of the ministries.
3. The third option was to transfer the ministries to another Church body. This was rejected as it could be seen as disrespectful of the commitment of lay collaborators and would have inevitably led to the diminishment/loss of the treasure that is the Saint John of God way.

⁵ Laurence Kearns, *New Governance for Ancient Hospitality: The Founding of Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries*, 2nd Ed. (Saint John of God Hospitaller Services Group, 2018), 13.

⁶ *New Governance for Ancient Hospitality*, 14-17

4. The final and chosen option was to establish a MPJP to continue the mission and ministries. This option was presented to the Brother's General Chapter in 2006 and research began shortly afterwards.⁷

The Brothers consulted the Apostolic See: Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL).⁸ CICLSAL's Sr Sharon Holland IHM provided detailed information on the MPJP option. A delegation was then sent to the Catholic Health Association of USA conference in 2007 where they met canonist and MPJP expert Rev Frank Morrissey OMI. Rev Morrissey provided advice on the contents of the MPJPs Statutes and By-laws. While in USA the delegation also met with St Joseph Health System, Orange and Bon Secours Health System.

In choosing a name for the MPJP the Brothers were advised by Sr Mary Wright IBVM at CICLSAL that they could include the words "Saint John of God." The Brothers wanted to include the words "Saint John of God Hospitaller" in the MPJP's name as they saw it as a continuation of the charism as well as a continuation of the ministries. The Brothers also included the word "ministries" in the MPJP name as they wanted to reinforce the image of the services as being works of Christ and of the Church. Other alternatives could have been "system" or "care services".

Formation of the inaugural Trustee/Sponsors⁹ was a priority for the Brothers as it was for the Bon Secours Sisters in Ireland, who were also in the process of establishing a MPJP. They contracted with Dr Thom Morris of Bon Secours Health System, USA for he and Sr Cathy O'Connor to deliver a three-day formation programs in Ireland in 2010, 2011, 2013, 2015 and 2017 for potential Trustee/Sponsors of the two MPJPs. The content included:

- ✓ Foundation stories of the congregations;
- ✓ The person being the central focus of a health and social care ministry;
- ✓ Spirituality and Sponsorship;
- ✓ Sponsorship as ministry;
- ✓ Catholic Social Teaching; and
- ✓ Canon Law and Sponsorship.¹⁰

From 2010 onwards, there were many meetings and communications with the brothers in Ireland and England, the General Council and Roman Curia to ensure that they were aware of the MPJP proposal and to address any concerns.

In 2012, the Provincial of the Brothers wrote to the Brothers and other stakeholders informing them of the decision to establish a MPJP. The three reasons given were: (1) the Vatican II call that lay people exercise a greater leadership role in the apostolic ministries of the Church; (2) The desire among the Brothers' lay collaborators that they "play an

⁷ *New Governance for Ancient Hospitality*, 33-36

⁸ From June 05, 2022, this body is named the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (DICLSAL)

⁹ This project acknowledges that the Statutes of Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries use the term "Member" for the people that Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries also call "Sponsor". However, for consistency across this project, the term "Trustee/Sponsor" is used to refer to those persons who are appointed as responsible for the MPJP.

¹⁰ *New Governance for Ancient Hospitality*, 60

active leadership role in promoting evangelisation through the ministries of the Church” and (3) “the requirement for professional competence in leadership, management and governance... particularly in the fields of healthcare, social care, education and welfare service.”¹¹

The petition to establish a MPJP was submitted to the Apostolic See on March 16, 2012, with letters of support from all the bishops in whose dioceses the MPJP had ministries. At the suggestion of one of the personnel at CICLSAL, the petitioner and ongoing Member¹² of the MPJP is the Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God headquartered in Rome (not the West European Province of is the Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God). This is because the worldwide entity was considered to have more stability than a particular Province.

The Apostolic See issued a decree establishing the MPJP Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries on July 30, 2012. The first Trustee/Sponsors were appointed in September 2012. They formed a governance committee to determine civil governance structure for the MPJP (as canonical establishment is not recognised in Irish law). In 2015 the incorporated company “Saint John of God Hospitaller Services Group” (HSG) was established and in 2018 it was granted charity status. As the ministries were already incorporated, HSG became the sole member/owner of these companies, replacing the Brothers.

MPJP overview

The MPJP, Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries (HM)¹³ and its civil equivalent Saint John of God Hospitaller Services Group (HSG)¹⁴ have ministries in Ireland, England and Malawi¹⁵ which address:

- ✓ Autism;
- ✓ Aged care;
- ✓ Community services incl. support for people experiencing: poverty; modern slavery; homelessness; addiction;
- ✓ Education for people with a disability and health care workers;
- ✓ Mental health; and
- ✓ Intellectual and other disabilities.¹⁶

Figure 1 below shows HSG with its subsidiary companies and HM as a twin to HSG.

¹¹ *New Governance for Ancient Hospitality*, 81

¹² The main role of the Member is to appoint Trustee/Sponsors. Persons that this project refers to as “Members” are referred to as “Participating Entities” within Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries

¹³ Hereafter referred to as the HM

¹⁴ Hereafter referred to as the HSG

¹⁵ Initially, the Malawi ministries were not part of the MPJP. They were included in January 2024.

¹⁶ See: Appendix A. Ministries of Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries

Figure 1. Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries organisational structure¹⁷



The canonist, Rev Frank Morrissey OMI, advised the Brothers to have the MPJP established with mirror Boards (the same people on both the governing body of the MPJP and of its civil entity).¹⁸ They are mirror in the sense that the same people comprised both boards. Table 1 shows the complementary roles of HM and HSG. HM is responsible to the Church and as such is primarily concerned that the mission, ethics, and principles are understood and applied by HSG. HSG is the means by which HM exercises this responsibility.

¹⁷ Saint John of God Hospitaller Services Group, *Chairs, HSG Board & CEO's Meeting Papers, Tuesday March 25th & Wednesday March 26th 2025* (HSG, 2025), 3

¹⁸ Interview, March 18, 2025

Table 1 Key Governance Elements of Saint John of God Hospitaller Services Group and Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries

Saint John of God Hospitaller Services Group	Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries
Civil incorporated (with Constitution) but no canonical status	No civil incorporation but is canonically established PJP (with Statutes)
Responsible body is Board of Directors	Responsible body is Board of Sponsors
The same people sit on both Boards	
Roles: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "To maintain and promote the mission and values 2. To ensure the financial sustainability of the Group and its constituent entities 3. To protect the assets transferred from the Order to the Group 4. To approve and support trustees to the subsidiary boards"¹⁹ also <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Determine overall strategy 6. Provide shared services for entities as appropriate 7. Ensure compliance with relevant civil laws by Saint John of God Hospitaller Services Group and all its subsidiaries 8. Exercise reserve powers in relation to subsidiaries (e.g., appointment of Directors, determine mission/purpose; determine guiding principles, determine formation; financial thresholds for debt/expenditure) 	Roles: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure that "the ministries carry forward the ministry of Jesus Christ ... in the manner of Saint John of God."²⁰ 2. Ensure "activities are conducted in a manner consistent with the teachings and laws of the Catholic Church as approved in the diocese in which it has services"²¹ 3. Adhere to "the guiding principles as approved by (the Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God)."²² 4. Stewardship of property "Ownership, management and governance of...facilities, programmes and services"²³
Employees are: Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Executive team and support staff.	No employees

The boards of HSG and HM schedule their meetings on alternate months. There is some flexibility around Board agendas as urgent issues are sometimes addressed during the other Boards meeting.

The HM Trustee/Sponsors recruit and vet potential Trustee/Sponsors and submit these to the Prior General and his Council for approval. The Trustee/Sponsors have a Governance Committee that considers succession planning. There are often "like for like" recruitments e.g., "someone with a legal background is leaving so we look for someone else with a legal

¹⁹ Saint John of God Hospitaller Services Group, Chairs, HSG Board & CEO's Meeting Papers, Tuesday March 25th & Wednesday March 26th, 2025, page 14

²⁰ Statutes Article II Purpose (quoted in *New Governance for Ancient Hospitality*, 117)

²¹ Statutes Article II Purpose (quoted in *New Governance for Ancient Hospitality*, 117)

²² Statutes Article II Purpose (quoted in *New Governance for Ancient Hospitality*, 117)

²³ Statutes Article II Purpose (quoted in *New Governance for Ancient Hospitality*, 117)

background.” Often Trustee/Sponsors know someone who they believe is suitable for consideration by the Board.

The Statutes require that all Trustee/Sponsors must be a member of the Roman Catholic Church.²⁴ No Trustee/Sponsor receives a fee/salary for their service, although approved costs incurred in their role are paid by Saint John of God Hospitaller Services Group.

The costs of Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries and Saint John of God Hospitaller Services Group are funded by payments by subsidiaries and from the fundraising Foundation.

The Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God holds the following reserve powers:²⁵

- a) approve any change to purpose, guiding principles, Statutes/By-laws;
- b) approve admission/removal of Members;
- c) determine formation process of Trustee/Sponsors;
- d) appoint/remove Trustee/Sponsors;
- e) determine the term of office for Trustee/Sponsors;
- f) appoint external auditors; and
- g) request dissolution of Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries.

MPJP's current successes

Some of the current Trustee/Sponsors and Brothers identified the following as examples of structures and processes that are successful:

- ✓ People are attracted to the vision and mission as expressed by the Brothers of St John of God. People want to participate in continuing this vision and mission – this is true among those who join the Board of Sponsors and subsidiary boards. In one sense, it is a desire to improve the lives of those who the ministries serve, e.g. people with mental illness, people with an intellectual disability. Almost everyone has someone in their family who is affected by these conditions so there is a strong empathy and affinity. In another sense, it is the spiritual impact of seeing and encountering Christ in the vulnerable person and recognising/embracing your own vulnerability.
- ✓ A story offered as an example of the success of HM was around an issue of funding from the Irish government. The government had threatened to offer a Saint John of God ministry less money to operate than the ministry needed. In consultation with the Trustee/Sponsors, the ministry told the government that it would rather not operate the service than do so with less funds and with substandard quality. This was a moment of clarity for the organisation where they said “we stand for quality. We will not be party to seeing people in need getting an inadequate service”. The

²⁴ Statutes Article IV Section 1 Appointment, Removal and Qualifications

²⁵ Statutes Article III Section 6 Matters Reserved to the Participating Entities and By-Laws Section 2.8

organisation took this stand, even though there was a risk that the public reception of the standoff might be negative.

- ✓ Another example of the success of the HM is the tone of board meetings. These are described as being alive, dynamic, active and reflective. Issues are identified and debated thoroughly.
- ✓ The current Board of Sponsors/Board of Directors is comprised of highly skilled people who share the same values/mission and work well together. The skill set is broad and encompasses health, legal, business as well as theology and pastoral work.
- ✓ All Sponsors/Directors are unpaid volunteers which encourages candidates whose intention is not to secure a source of income. These people are often selfless and motivated by a personal connection (often family member) who has experienced mental illness or disability.
- ✓ There is a high degree of subsidiarity and autonomy given to HSG's six separately incorporated subsidiary companies. This empowers the company boards to be proactive in identifying issues and opportunities and maximising the benefits for their local communities. HSG is the single shareholder in each of those companies.
- ✓ At the moment, there is a Brother who is Board Chair of Saint John of God Foundation in Ireland and another Brother who is Board Chair in Malawi until the end of 2025. This gives some assurance of the mission fidelity of those board discussions and actions.
- ✓ The role of the Trustee/Sponsors as facilitators of the unity of ministries is also held up as an example of the HM's success. Inevitably tensions arise between ministries and between ministries and the board. In recent years, the Trustee/Sponsors have brought together the Chairs of boards and their CEOs. These meetings enabled the different ministries to discuss their work and their shared issues. They said that they left with an appreciation that they are part of a larger organisation with a broad and deep mission that includes their particular ministry.
- ✓ The international gatherings of the leadership of HSG have taken on a tradition of singing that is common in Malawi. There is a hymn related to Saint John of God that the whole groups now sings at the beginning of these gatherings.
- ✓ HSG prides itself on continuing the Brothers commitment to continuous quality improvement. One of its ministries is the Saint John of God Research Foundation. Each year the Foundation holds a conference with staff and other experts showcasing exciting developments and best practice.
- ✓ The Saint John of God Brothers organise spiritual events that attract the participation of some of the residents/clients and staff. Examples include: an annual pilgrimage to the Marian site at Knock, Co Mayo, Ireland and an annual Mass for deceased Brothers and staff and the Brother's celebrations of significant anniversaries/length of membership.

MPJP's current challenges

Some of the current Trustee/Sponsors and Brothers nominated the following as some of their most significant challenges:

- ❖ There are some risks in having Trustee/Sponsors (e.g., Brothers) as the Chair of a subsidiary company Board. In this circumstance, the Board Chair is reporting to HSG Board of which s/he is already a member. There is a sense of reporting to and being accountable to oneself. There is also a risk that the subsidiary Board members may unduly defer to the Chair knowing that s/he is a member of parent company Board. This could stifle the free exchange and contest of ideas/perspectives/proposals that is essential in a high functioning board.
- ❖ Induction is often in the form of a conversation (s) between the Chair and the new Trustee/Sponsor regarding current/anticipated issues and what's expected and what's required. There is a desire to develop a more consistent and comprehensive induction.
- ❖ It is a challenge to find a new identity that reflects the fact that organisation is now not part of the Brothers. HM-HSG is still in the first stages of articulating a new identity that honours their past, reflects their ecclesial nature and is also engaging of staff/clients/patients who are of a different or no faith. HM see it as vital that their leaders both have a clear sense of identity and have confidence in this mission.
- ❖ There is a considerable time commitment for the Trustee/Sponsors, particularly the Chair, to be present to the ministries as an ecclesial leader. The current practice of not paying a fee to Trustee/Sponsors means that the time-consuming Chair role is only an option for retired or independently wealthy individual. A fee commensurate with the time and skill required may be necessary, if HM/HSG wants to attract working-age people and people who need an income to this role.
- ❖ It can be a challenge to find non-threatening ways to offer prayer and reflection to staff who are not Catholic or who have no or minimal connection with Christianity. HM-HSG wants to provide opportunities for reflection that are both meaningful/engaging for all and which honour the Catholic tradition. Ministries often use "non-churchy" language and rituals that respect and engage all of their people.
- ❖ Some of the leaders in HM-HSG ministries are engaged because of their technical skills/knowledge which they contribute to their employment or board role. These people are committed to the work, want to work with HSG for part of their life, and they are at least comfortable with, if not inspired by, the vision of Saint John of God. Their first commitment is to the work and then perhaps to the mission. This is a different affiliation to their predecessors, the Brothers, whose first connection was to the mission and then to the ministries. The Brothers also make a commitment to both the mission and ministries for life.

MPJP's current expression of synodality

In recent years, Pope Francis has led the adoption of the term “synodality” to describe a way that the Church can better live out the vision of Vatican II. Synodality can be understood as comprised of expressions of theology, culture, structures and behaviours.²⁶

Synodality is not a chapter in an ecclesiology textbook, much less a fad or a slogan to be bandied about in our meetings. Synodality is an expression of the church's nature, her form, style and mission.²⁷

Given the significance of synodality to the Church, current Trustee/Sponsors and Brothers provided the following examples of synodality in their MPJP:

- The Trustee/Sponsors hear the diverse voices within their ministries mainly via the HSG CEO. This person meets once a month with all the subsidiary CEOs across the organisation. The HSG CEOs monthly report to the board provides all relevant information.
- Some of the Trustee/Sponsors visit ministries and hear directly from clients and staff.
- The Trustee/Sponsors invite representatives from the different ministries to speak when they have a priority issue. For example, one of the HM's schools for children with a disability were looking for a new school site because the present site was not suitable. Some people had concerns about a prospective site, so the HM Chair visited and invited a delegate to speak to the wider board.
- The HSG Mission Director conducts culture audits and informs the board of the results.
- An example of communal discernment was the episode mentioned earlier of the consideration of withdrawing services rather than providing substandard services. The Board of Sponsors spent considerable time in prayer and discernment before agreeing on a response.
- Each meeting of the Board begins with prayer. Each Trustee/Sponsor takes a turn in preparing and leading the prayer. This has helped each Trustee/Sponsor express their faith publicly and for the whole Board of Sponsors to be enriched by the different perspectives of its members. These periods of prayer usually take 10-15 minutes of the Boards three-hour meeting.
- The chair of the Board of Sponsors is deliberate in appreciating the gifts that each Trustee/Sponsor brings.

²⁶ Francis, and XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. *Final Document: For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*. (Vatican: Apostolic See, 2024).
https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf.

²⁷ Francis, *Address in Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops* (Apostolic See, 2015),
https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.htm

MPJP's relationship with other Church bodies

The HM Statutes require/request that HM engage with other parts of the Church.²⁸ The current Trustee/Sponsors and Brothers made the following comments regarding the relationship that HM/HSG ministries have with the rest of the Church.

- HM Statutes require an annual stewardship report be sent to the Apostolic See: DICLSAL. One year, a number of Trustee/Sponsors also met with the Prefect of DICLSAL to present the annual stewardship report and to discuss MPJP issues in general. The Trustee/Sponsors would like to repeat this experience of more than one of them coming to Rome and meeting with DICLSAL.
- The annual stewardship report is also sent to the bishops in each of the diocese in which HSG provides ministries/services. The letter accompanying that report offered a meeting with the HM Chair. Some bishops took up this offer to discuss HSG services and their place in the local Church.
- The HSG CEO and the Chair meet (usually annually) with the chair of the Catholic Healthcare Council of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference. The bishop who chairs this council is the HSG point of connection with the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference.
- In Malawi the bishops are very interested in HSG services. The bishops take pride in these services as being an expression of Church. The Trustee/Sponsors try to balance respecting the bishop's rightful role as local Church leader, with messages that clarify the distinct role/rights of the MPJP.
- HSG has very little engagement with parishes and dioceses in Ireland. The Trustee/Sponsors would like to see more engagement with the wider Church in Ireland. The Trustee/Sponsors see the possibility that they could offer HSG's assistance to parishes who are keen to be more inclusive of people with an intellectual disability or who experience mental illness. Trustee/Sponsors would like to encourage parishes to do more than have the occasional prayer or event for people with disabilities. They would like to see people with a disability being integral members of the parish, e.g., where fellow parishioners want to bring them to the football matches, to bring them to the pubs or wherever they have a shared interest.
- While most staff identify with the vision and mission of John of God and to a lesser extent with Jesus. The same cannot be said for the staff attitude towards the Church. Particularly in Ireland there is indifference and hostility amongst the general populations towards the Catholic Church due its past behaviour.

²⁸ Statutes Article V, Relationship to the Holy See; and Article VI Relationship with the Local Bishop

MPJP's plans/hopes for future

HSG and its subsidiary companies each develop their own strategic plans, many of which are publicly available.²⁹ In a less formal and comprehensive manner, the current Trustee/Sponsors and Brothers have offered the following as some of their hopes for the future of their MPJP:

Vision/philosophy



- ♥ The Chair of the Trustee/Sponsors says that he conceptualises HSG as involving three perspectives: the professional, the pastoral and the spiritual circles around any organisation. He says that HSG is at its best in the space where all three perspectives come together like in overlapping circles.

Trustee/Sponsor role

- ♥ The HSG Board of Directors is currently reviewing its roles and responsibilities and will consider the need for a position description that expresses current requirements/expectations for members of Board of Sponsors and Board of Directors.
- ♥ The Board of Sponsors hope to discuss if, how and when Trustee/Sponsors, in particular the Chair, should represent HM by visiting ministries, including those overseas, to fulfill their role as ecclesial leaders, for example: forming relationships, participating in major events, providing guidance/support and meeting with local bishops. There is a recognition that when the Brothers were responsible, these visits

²⁹ For example: Saint John of God Community Services https://sjogcommunityservices.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/FinalStrategicPlan2023_2025.pdf Saint John of God Hospital <https://www.stjohnofgodhospital.ie/downloads/publications/SJOGH%202023%20-%202026%20PLAN.pdf> Saint John of God Housing Association <https://sjoghousingassociation.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Final-DIGITAL-SJOGHA-Strategic-Plan.pdf> Saint John of God UK https://sjog.uk/pdf/SJOG_Strategy_From_2024.pdf

were conducted by the Provincial and his Council. HM is open to looking at how such visits a lay person as Chair of a MPJP would be the same or different to those undertaken by a Provincial of the Brothers.

- ♥ The Board of Sponsors acknowledge their burden of responsibility and time commitment and hope to discuss whether some form of fee/salary is required to enable a full range of people, including working age people, to take up the role of Trustee/Sponsor and Chair.

Trustee/Sponsor recruitment and formation

- ♥ The initial appointments of Trustee/Sponsors were mainly of men and a greater effort is being made to find suitable women as new Trustee/Sponsors. The aim is to on average have even numbers of women and men as Trustee/Sponsors.
- ♥ The Trustee/Sponsors are concerned that its Board of Sponsors and HSG Board of Directors should not be dominated by the Irish. Having members from England or Malawi would introduce other perspectives and signal the inclusion/importance of these regions. However, there are issues with cost and inconvenience due to the frequency of meetings and the various meeting options (in-person with travel time and cost and videoconference with lack of spontaneity and difficulty of relationship building). Trustee/Sponsors hope to progress their discussion of these issues.
- ♥ Formation of new Trustee/Sponsors both initial and ongoing is a priority so as to avoid dilution of ecclesial identity and mission. Given the reducing number of Brothers and their reducing ability to contribute to HM, there is a recognition that formation needs to be owned by and carried out by the HM independent of the Brothers. The employment of a Mission Director has already provided improvements in this area.
- ♥ HM is open to explore the possibility of a formal installation or commissioning ceremony when a person takes on the role of HM Trustee/Sponsor. Such a ceremony could help to communicate that the role is a ministry of the church. As HM operates in the name of the Church, a public ceremony and some Church recognition seems appropriate for this role. The ceremony could acknowledge that God has called the person to this role, the person has accepted this role, and the wider Church affirms the person to be a Trustee/Sponsor of this Church ministry and prays that God bless them in this role. There are significant implications in the details of the ceremony e.g. who is the Church body that formally recognises the person's installation/commissioning – is it a representative of the Apostolic See as it established HM?, is it a representative of the Prior General as the Statutes name him as the appointer (but does that give the impression that HM is a subsidiary of the Brothers?), is it the congregation at the ceremony with a priest/bishop as their spokesperson? HM would do well to consider carefully the words, actions and participants of a possible installation or commissioning ceremony to ensure that they correctly convey their identity as a MPJP and their proper relationship with other Church bodies/leaders.
- ♥ Trustee/Sponsors recounted a meeting that they had with Cardinal Joao Braz de Avis, then Prefect of CICLSAL where he told them that he is concerned about the third generation of Trustee/Sponsors in a MPJP. His fear was that the MPJP/its ministries could lose their ecclesial dimension if many of the third generation Trustee/Sponsors have only heard about the founding religious institute and they

have no current experience/knowledge of the religious institute and its members. Cardinal de Avis had heard of MPJPs whose ministries were defining their identity and purpose more in terms of corporate growth and service excellence rather than continuing the mission of Jesus. HM Trustees/Sponsors are committed to ensuring that HM and HSG grow in their understanding and application of their mission “to carry forward the healing ministry of Jesus Christ in the Catholic Church.”³⁰

MPJP structures

- ♥ HM has existed for twelve years with the mirror board structure. There is an openness among Trustee/Sponsors to review whether this is still the appropriate structure (e.g., (1) it requires holding together the diverse skill sets of canonical and civil governance in the same Board; and (2) it requires that all Board of Directors must be Catholic – even though it is only advantageous among the canonically responsible persons)
- ♥ The canonical By-laws require that the Trustee/Sponsors include at least three Brothers.³¹ This will be increasingly difficult as the number of Brothers decrease, especially in Ireland where HM is based. Further consideration is needed on whether this requirement is needed or how it could best be fulfilled.

MPJP ministries

- ♥ Trustee/Sponsors wondered how the Board of Sponsors and Board of Directors can reassure themselves that the information they are receiving truly reflects the situation in the ministries. One possibility is that these boards have members from each country. Another possibility is that Board members undertake visits to ministries. There is a need to clear about the purpose of the exercise and of the best possible means of achieving this purpose.
- ♥ Trustee/Sponsors are conscious of the need for suitable formation for the CEOs and senior leaders of ministries. The nature of this formation is under regular review.
- ♥ “Spotting talent” – identifying and fostering emerging leaders is a priority. Who is doing the spotting and how are opportunities realised is a topic for discussion.
- ♥ Thanks to deinstitutionalisation – HSG services are now in hundreds of locations. Previously, they used to have closer supervision when clients/patients lived in the same place and participated in activities together. Now their people are scattered throughout the community in their own homes and pursuing their chosen activities. This change is something that HM-HSG celebrates, but it is a challenge for them having staff operating without direct supervision and in environments beyond their control. They still need to ensure that all of their staff are being true to HM-HSG values, are providing quality services and that they and clients will not be harmed. This aspect of quality assurance requires constant supervision and review.

³⁰ Statutes: Preamble

³¹ By-laws Article III, 3.3 Appointment of Members

- ♥ HM-HSG is currently conducting a review of its services in light of what other organisations are providing and recognising the strengths/uniqueness of HSG. The purpose of the review is to ensure that limited resources are allocated where they can best deliver “the provision of services to vulnerable and marginalised people in the manner of Saint John of God and in accordance with our values.”³²
- ♥ Innovation has always been a part of the Saint John of God way of proceeding and HM-HSG wants this embedded into the future

Trustee/Sponsors are hope-filled when they consider the future. They draw attention to the enthusiasm, competence and cultural fit of those who are soon to take up roles as Trustee/Sponsors and on their Boards. They are people who seem to be drawn by vision and services. Trustee/Sponsors have a sense that the Holy Spirit is working in and through people, calling them and giving them the grace to respond. There is something happening that is more than the efforts of the Trustee/Sponsors.

Conclusion

Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries was established in 2012, and it is not yet at its third generation of Trustee/Sponsors which Cardinal de Avis has heard can be problematic. The current Trustee/Sponsors include three Brothers who are active contributors so there is no need to fear people not having a memory of the Brothers.

The way of working and the works of the Brothers are still flourishing. This appears to be a fulfillment of the Brothers’ hope that “that the work of Saint John of God will continue as a ministry of the church.” Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries still attracts and retains people who want to work in Saint John of God the way of hospitality – accepting the person, being moved with compassion and giving them your best. Trustee/Sponsors aim to make this the organisation’s culture - from the board table to the staff at the peripheries.

The Trustee/Sponsors have shown themselves to be open and reflective. They have been as detailed of their successes as they are of their challenges. Their hopes for the future are both practical and aspirational.

It has been said of St John of God services that “St John of God do things well”. This certainly true of Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries.

³² *Chairs, HSG Board & CEO’s Meeting Papers, Tuesday March 25th & Wednesday March 26th 2025*

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Appendix A. Ministries of Saint John of God Hospitaller Ministries

Ireland

Dementia care – *day care centre and residential care facility*

Intellectual disability – *four training, employment, social and residential programmes in Ireland*

Mental health – *for children, adolescents and adults including hospital and community services*

Research Foundation - *promotes and supports research in the areas of intellectual disability, mental health, and old age by providing to HSG ministries: (1) a research support service; (2) training; (3) access to up-to-date peer-reviewed research and (4) a competitive funding stream for research projects across all HSG ministries in Ireland and Malawi.*

Special schools – *seven schools in Ireland for children and teens*

England

Autism – *residential care and support for adults with autism*

Homelessness - *accommodation and support for people experiencing homelessness*

Intellectual disability – *supported living, residential care and housing management services*

Modern slavery - *support services for survivors*

Research and advocacy – *best practices guidelines and background papers on key issues*

Seniors – *supporting religious institutes care for their elderly members*

Malawi

Addiction services

Children and teens with a disability/mental health condition - *education and development services*

Children who are experiencing homelessness - *accommodation and support services*

Mental health – *hospital, supported accommodation, outpatient services*

Seniors – *health and wellness centres*

University – *specialising in health sciences*

Vocational training

Women's self-help groups