

# The Grand Commander's Program 2020-21

## R. Thomas Starr, KCT

### "Blessed Be the Tie that Binds"

*"Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love; the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above."*

One of my favorite hymns begins with those words, written by English minister John Fawcett, who though he was called to serve a large London church, opted to remain with his small congregation in the countryside. Dr. Fawcett sacrificed professional advancement for a greater purpose, choosing service to his tiny flock at home over what most would consider a "higher calling".

In the Entered Apprentice lecture, we learn that "Freemasons...are linked together by an indissoluble chain of sincere affection." The tie that binds us as a band of Brothers and as Sir Knights and believers in the Christian faith, should be stronger than steel and as enduring as eternity. For my emblem this year, I have chosen a Celtic knot with familiar Templar symbols the Cross and Shield contained therein surmounted by my theme as a reminder of the intimate connection we share through our beloved fraternity.

Faith, family, and friends are the cornerstones of our lives as Christian Masons. Nothing has come to mean more to me than the friends I have made through our Fraternity, almost all of whom "might have remained at a perpetual distance" if not for our linkage through Freemasonry. It is this tie that binds us as Brothers, Companions, and Sir Knights, working together, that allows us to advance our beloved Fraternity beyond what any man can do alone.

As True Knights of the Cross, our Christian charity should extend not only on a broad level to support our worthy philanthropies, but on a personal level to assist our neighbors, brothers, and sisters in close proximity to us, keeping in mind that we can assist those in need with time, talent, and treasure. The greatest of these may be time, for our daily commitments often dictate how much time we may be able to spend helping others today, while our mortality promises us no tomorrow.

Just a few short months ago our world and our place in it changed dramatically. We are reminded daily that we are living in times of great uncertainty potentially fraught with difficulty and danger. In whom do you put your trust? Our great nation, if not our very faith, is being tested. Has there ever been a more clear and obvious moment when we as Christian Masons should turn to our Blessed Savior, rededicate our lives to his service, and ask humbly for the comfort and relief that manifests itself in the bonds of friendship and brotherly love that we find in Templar Masonry?

Until we can once again share each other's company in traditional Templar activities, we must as Commanderies and Sir Knights return to our Christian roots and ask, "What can I do to help my brother, neighbor or friend today?" Each of us knows Brothers or widows who need help but are often too proud to ask, or they simply do not want to bother us because we are surely too busy. Practice a little "aggressive hospitality" to make sure they know they are not imposing on you when you are headed to the grocery store or if their lawn needs mowed or their sidewalk needs shoveled. If your Commandery has a relief fund, help a Sir Knight or a widow with their electric bill or a gift card. We need to be creative in extending ourselves at a time when the traditional social connections we have always known are more difficult to make.

Let us then treasure our ties that bind and remind ourselves each day of our duty to God, our neighbor and ourselves, living a life of Christian service to our fellow man and our Creator through the example of servant-leadership, a life with no regrets. In the end that our works may be acceptable in His sight so that, in the words of that old hymn, *"When we are called to part, it gives us inward pain; but we shall still be joined in heart, and hope to meet again."*

**Membership:** So often when there is a discussion of membership, the focus is on knightings. After all, bringing new members into our ranks is the way an organization grows. It is exciting to confer our Orders and share the lessons with Companions who seek more light. But what do we do when we cannot meet in person and confer our beautiful Orders? Our Grand Master has made membership the highest priority during his Triennium, with a focus on Recruitment, Retention, and Restoration. When we are not able to grow through knightings, we must make the

Templar experience better and more fulfilling for our members and reach out to those who were with us once but for some reason drifted away. Per the Vision Statement on the Grand Encampment website, “It is our intent that by the end of this 68th Triennium (2021), the Grand Encampment of Knight Templars will have achieved an increase of at least 5% in new knightings that year (Recruitment), suffered no more than a 2% loss in total membership from the number of demits and suspensions (Retention) and realized at least a 2% gain in the number of Sir Knights restored from suspension or demit (Restoration). *Note: percentages are calculated as a percent of the total membership as of the beginning of that year.*” Ohio has long prided itself as the Crown Jewel of the Grand Encampment. As such, we should expect to exceed these goals. I have great confidence in our membership chairman, Sir Knight Jim Langmead, to lead in this endeavor. If our most active Sir Knights would simply sign one new petition or reach out to a disenfranchised Sir Knight who is considering leaving our Fraternity, or bring back one who has, we would easily reach our goal.

**Youth Organizations:** More than anything else, our youth groups need some of our time. The eyes of these young men and women light up when a Brother attends one of their meetings. The adult advisors who work closely with DeMolay, Job’s Daughters, and Rainbow are doing yeoman’s work, and they could use a little help. This is the way we pay forward. Let us do all we can to see that our youth groups succeed. You may be surprised how much you will enjoy the interaction!

**Knights Templar Eye Foundation:** As a long-time state chairman, I could not be prouder of what our Commanderies and our Sir Knights and Ladies have done to support the KTEF! Reaching 100% Life Sponsor participation was a great achievement, and we should continue to generously support our flagship Templar philanthropy. The generosity of Forest City Commandery No. 40 has enabled us to reach 200% Life Sponsor participation, something we never dreamed possible so soon when we began our campaign in 2018. Many Sir Knights have asked me about the Crusader’s Cross, the beautiful uniform jewel from Grand Encampment awarded to a Sir Knight who becomes a member of the Grand Master’s Club. It requires a cumulative donation of \$1,000.00 and can be paid over time. For every \$1,000.00 beyond the original gift, a Sir Knight receives a new jewel with an additional quadrant or “arm of the cross”. It is certainly a wonderful way to show your continued support of the Knights Templar Eye Foundation!

**Holy Land Pilgrimage:** Is there a more noble cause for true and faithful followers of the cross to support? Ohio is blessed to have Sir Knights Duane Kemerley and David Snyder actively leading Christian ministers when they visit the Holy Land. I strongly urge each Division to nominate a pastor using the guidelines that are available on the Grand Encampment website, and each Commandery to consider sponsoring a deserving minister. The lives of the men and women who preach the Gospel are changed forever after walking in the footsteps of Jesus. I have been moved to tears more than once when they share their experiences. There is no program more near and dear to my heart than the Holy Land Pilgrimage, and you honor me and all Knights Templar by supporting it.

**Civic, Public, and Patriotic Activities:** Knights Templar have traditionally appeared in public in uniform to post our nation’s colors, march in parades, attend church services, and stand guard to honor our fallen Sir Knights. Each time we do, we show respect to God, our country, and our fraters. Each year, many of us travel to the George Washington Masonic National Memorial in Arlington, Virginia, to attend the Grand Encampment Easter Sunrise Service, where cries of “He is Risen!” and “Hosanna!” echo in the environs of our nation’s capital. Wear your Templar uniform proudly and participate in as many of these activities as possible!

**Drill Teams:** Drill competition is a long-standing tradition at our Grand Conclave, and though we have seen a reduction in the number of teams and Sir Knights on the drill floor in recent years, there is nothing – NOTHING! – that builds camaraderie in a Commandery better than working together as part of a Drill Team! Whether it is Field or Asylum Drill, there is a Drill every Commandery can participate in, and there is no shortage of experienced participants who will mentor a Commandery that wants to put a team on the floor! Help us create a resurgence in our highly regarded Drill competition!

**Ritual Competition:** Our Ritual competition is growing in popularity and is an excellent showcase for our outstanding ritualists to show their stuff! Every Commandery has qualified Sir Knights who are not just proficient but are downright awe-inspiring when reciting Ritual! Each year at Grand Conclave, Sir Knights may choose to demonstrate their proficiency in several portions of the Ritual selected for competition. We recognize the top three ritualists in each area of competition at our Awards Banquet on Saturday evening at Grand Conclave.

**The Ohio Masonic Home:** The Ohio Masonic Home is the living expression of our Masonic values. With three campuses and the OMH Resource Center, the Home is in position to assist a Brother and his wife or widow in need of services, as well as the public at large. Please continue to support the work of the Ohio Masonic Home.

**Observance of Holy Days:** Each Commandery is required to observe our Christian Holy Days – Christmas, Easter, and Ascension Day - with an appropriate service or event to commemorate their importance to our Christian faith. Unless the observance is part of a stated conclave, non-Masons may participate. In fact, a public event can be an excellent opportunity to showcase our Templar traditions and values to the outside world.

**York Rite Festivals:** York Rite Festivals or “Reunions” are encouraged to build camaraderie within our Divisions, raise the quality of ritual in the conferral of our Orders, and demonstrate flexibility to prospective candidates whose schedules may conflict with traditional initiatory work in our Commanderies. The General Orders contain details regarding how individual Commanderies receive credit for meeting conferral requirements when participating in a Festival.

**Ritual and Tactics:** Strict observance of our Ritual and Tactics is expected. The Commandery Orders are among the most impressive in Freemasonry. Memorization is required, except for those areas specifically denoted in the Ritual. Our first opportunity to impress a new Knight may be the only one we have. It is our responsibility to do the best we can. To that end, each Division shall conduct an annual School of Instruction to ensure that the Ritual, Tactics, and Templar Protocol are observed properly.

**Templar Education Programs** or subjects of interest to the membership are also encouraged to foster discussion where all Sir Knights can learn from one another. During the shutdown, we were given the opportunity to conduct stated Conclaves electronically. It has been heartwarming to visit with Sir Knights who reside out-of-state (or country) and those who do not drive at night or cannot attend in person due to health reasons. I have enjoyed a number of Masonic-based educational programs and others by a Brother or Sir Knight on subjects that pique their interest away from Freemasonry. We must take advantage of the options available to us; we owe it to our fraters and the fraternity that we love so much.

Sir Knights, this is YOUR Grand Commandery! The Grand Officers have the honor and privilege of representing you, being good stewards, presiding for a period of time, practicing servant-leadership, and taking care of the required administrative responsibilities, but make no mistake, this Grand Commandery is part of all of us. I am thankful for your dedication to your constituent Commanderies and to the Grand Commandery of Ohio, the greatest Templar jurisdiction in the world!

Blessed be the tie that binds us together in Christian unity!

In His Service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "R. Thomas Starr". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

R. Thomas Starr, KCT  
Right Eminent Grand Commander