

The Grand Commander's Program 2021-2022

George Edmiston III, KCT

"Answer the Call"

First and foremost, I ask the Blessing of Almighty God and implore His aid in all our undertakings for the year ahead. Living my life as a just and upright Mason in the northeast corner of Ohio I cannot help but remember the charge to act and walk as such. Given the trials and vicissitudes incident to human life it is all too easy to lose faith and lose our way, all too easy to forget why we got so involved in the first place. Through patience and perseverance, courage and constancy, faith and humility, we shall find the harmony we need to ensure none go away dissatisfied. By working in harmony across the intimate connections of our various Masonic Bodies we gain strength and support to extend our cable-tow improving the experience for all. This coming year I am asking everyone to consider one main point. People will forget what we have said, they may even forget what we have done, but they will never forget how we made them feel.

I believe it is important that each of us remember what we were looking for when we were first brought from darkness to light. At some given point in time, we chose to start the journey that led us to where we are at this moment in time. Each of us, based on our own separate influences, have answered the call to become a Mason for one reason or another. Likewise, we each chose to join the York Rite and to become a Knights Templar. Each step along the way being influenced by men who we looked up to and respected. These were men who taught us to keep a tongue of good report, maintain secrecy and practice charity. They never hesitated to go out of their way to serve a worthy brother or remember you in their prayers and were always there to support a fallen brother.

The history of our Masonic fraternity is full of historic and legendary names of men who were known for being honorable men of integrity. These were men you could trust and depend on; men you knew you could count on to speak the truth. For me, it was one of those men that suggested I join each of the York Rite Bodies, which eventually led me to that moment where, we cannot be too often reminded that we are born to die. Sir Knights, I will never violate my Vow of Knighthood, nor will I ever forget the obligations I have taken upon myself along the way. As we work to improve ourselves, we must also be true to ourselves and trust in who we are and who we want to be.

As Masons we are called upon to look out for our brethren and their families. I call on each of you to join me in remembering and honoring our commitment to each other, not only for the work of the day but also in celebrating the solemn bond that unites us. We need to encourage and support each other. Remember to enjoy seeing old friends and getting better acquainted with new ones. Whisper good council into the ear of a less experienced Brother, Companion or Sir Knight and most importantly contribute to a positive experience for all we meet along our journey.

I therefore call on all Sir Knights of this valiant and magnanimous order to remember who we are and what we stand for, to remember our obligations and commitments, and to remember to enjoy our time together. I call on you to extend courtesy and hospitality while encouraging others, so all look forward to when we meet again. I call on you to support our Masonic Bodies but even more importantly to support each other. Sir Knights, I ask you now to "Answer the Call" to ensure a positive and memorable experience for all we meet. I ask you to travel with your friends and Ladies and be seen as Knights Templar by the Brethren of our Lodges and the Companions of our Chapters and Councils. Enjoy the Comradery of our fellowship so that others will truly observe how good it is to dwell together in unity and want to take part. I call on you to ensure others will have pleasant thoughts as they remember how you made them feel. Dear friends, I ask you to "Answer the Call".

Membership: There is nothing more important to the success of our fraternity than our members. The size of membership may often dictate the capabilities or limitations of a group. While we are still the largest Templar jurisdiction in the world, declining membership leaves less people to complete the work. As I look around, I find it is the same people doing the work no matter where you go or what you attend. I believe our members are among the hardest working Brothers in Freemasonry, but they are stretched thin. As we increase our labors it is important that we do not lose sight of ensuring a positive Templar experience. After all, it is the Templar experience that distinguishes us.

Along with the membership numbers we must not lose sight of the experience of each Companion on their journey to Knighthood. This may start sometimes before the man is even a Mason. Through positive experiences a worthy, well qualified man may seek to know the light of Freemasonry. As a Brother he may then want more light. A few of the important duties of a Commandery is to extend charity and hospitality. By going out of our way to be courteous, respectful, and encouraging to all we meet we can ensure a positive experience and good impression for all. We should promote positive membership growth across all bodies of the fraternity and encourage all who desire a great Templar experience to join the ranks of our Commanderies.

In addition to the patch, cap and jacket program, this year I am asking all commanderies in Ohio to work with our membership committees to promote what the York Rite has to offer. Perhaps each Division would consider putting together a fun evening where they would present a program promoting the York Rite. This could be over dinner or other social gathering where they would invite Lodge Brothers to join them in a night out. In addition, I am asking each Division to work with the Membership Chairman of your Division, and the contacts you have with the Chapter Districts and Council Arches in your Divisions to organize a York Rite Festival sometime in April or May for each Division. This does not have to be all degrees and orders on the same day, but the end goal should be to knight a large class in each Division during the month of May. These are just a couple of initiatives. I have great confidence in our State Membership Chairman, Sir Knight David J. Kern, to lead in these endeavors.

Traveling and Visitation: One of the best and most enjoyable parts of the Templar experience is traveling with our Friends and/or Ladies on various occasions to show support or visit with others. Whether it be traveling within the division, around the state, or across jurisdictions, making official visitations to a Lodge, Chapter or Council or just spending time traveling to a social or fun event to spend time getting to know each other or witnessing a new Companion or Sir Knight's entry into the Order there is no better way to experience the companionship, courtesy, hospitality, and genuine friendship that only Templary can provide. I would encourage all to join with friends to travel and visit often. Perhaps stop for dinner before or after if you like, or even just get together to golf, visit a local attraction, or go to an event together as a group.

It seems almost every Mason I have ever truly looked up to has spent much time in their Masonic career traveling and visiting around the district, arch, or division. Traveling Masons, in my opinion, tend to be more caring and understanding as well as more knowledgeable of the craft and capable of whispering good council to others. There are two Sir Knights that I have looked up to since becoming a Mason of which seemed to travel everywhere together and in honor of them, I am having two traveling banners made to encourage the Sir Knights of our Commanderies to travel together for comradery as well as to encourage a competitive spirit (not to mention bragging rights for the winners).

These two banners will be first presented at the Grand Commander's Reception on Saturday, November 13, 2021. The first banner will be known as the Frank T. England traveling Banner. SK England was a dedicated Mason with many titles including a 33°, Knight York Cross of Honour, Past District Deputy Grand Master, Past Deputy Division Commander, and Knight Templar Cross of Honor. This banner will be a traveling banner for within the Northeastern Division and will be presented to the commandery from the Northeastern Division with the most voting members in attendance at the reception. The second banner will be known as the Richard H. Palm traveling Banner. SK Palm was a dedicated Mason with many titles including a 33°, Knight York Grand Cross of Honour, Past Deputy Division Commander, Knight Commander of the Temple, Past Grand Recorder, and Right Eminent Past Grand Commander. This banner will be a traveling banner for the state of Ohio and will be presented to the commandery in Ohio with the most voting members in attendance at the reception.

These banners can be captured by another commandery by visiting a stated conclave of the commandery that possess it (the Frank T. England banner only within the Northeastern Division and the Richard H. Palm banner from any commandery in Ohio) with at least four voting members from their commandery present. The highest-ranking Sir Knight from the visiting commandery just needs to rise and address the Eminent Commander announcing who he is, what commandery he is from and introduce the visiting fraters accompanying him. The banner should be presented to him before closing the meeting to take back to his home commandery. If more than one qualifying visiting commandery is present the commandery with the most present will get the banner. If two with the same number are present than the commandery that traveled the furthest (from their home commandery) will take the banner.

Both banners will continue to be passed as commanderies travel to visit and claim them. Let's not forget about those bragging rights. I encourage the commandery that possesses either of these traveling banners to be sure to remind the other commanderies they have it at each opportunity (while keeping the comments friendly but with all the appropriate bragging rights being applied). It is my hope that this will lead to many happy memories while enjoying the Templar experience.

York Rite Festivals: Sir Knight Timothy S. Wheeland, Most Worshipful Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Ohio, is planning a Grand Master's Class in March 2022 and through research and data analysis has recognized that a Brother who gets involved in the York Rite and/or Scottish Rite tends to be more active and remain in good standing longer than those that do not. After consulting with Sir Knights Rodney L. Carr, Most Excellent Grand High Priest, and David G. Weimer, Most Illustrious Grand Master, we determined there is support and encourage each division to have a York Rite Festival culminating in the month of May. This will be an opportunity to build comradery and work together across the three bodies as well as across the individual commanderies in our divisions. The General Orders contain details regarding how individual Commanderies receive credit for meeting conferral requirements when participating in a Festival.

DeMolay Cooperation: In regard to investing in our future, I am excited to say we have appointed a very strong DeMolay Cooperation Committee this year. I have great confidence in this committee being led by Sir Knight Sean P. Carr. I am also challenging each of our divisions to appoint a minimum of a three-person committee to focus on DeMolay Cooperation. To avoid conflicting agendas, I am asking that the Division Committees not consist of anyone who is currently an Advisor for DeMolay. The Division Committees are charged with taking direction from our state committee and showing support for the local DeMolay Chapters that meet in or around where their divisions are located as a representative of Commandery. These representatives can then communicate information to the Sir Knights of their Division so they are aware of events such as degree work or other activities in case others are interested in attending. In addition, they can inform our commanderies of the needs of the DeMolay Chapters to assist us in determining how we can best support them.

Inspections: The inspection of each of our commanderies is an important part of what we do for so many reasons. It is not only to ensure that our records, finances, and business operations are in good order and operating according to our constitution, statutes, and by-laws but also to ensure our ritualistic work and proper use of protocol keeps the high impressive standards of the order so that all who gain admission have a positive and memorable experience. In addition, inspection day is an opportunity for us to visit and renew friendships while extending courtesy and hospitality. It should be a celebration where we share the Templar experience with our new Sir Knight and his Lady and invite others to come to join in the festivities of the day. While there is much work that goes into inspection day the goal should be to create a positive and memorable experience that all will enjoy. Details regarding the requirements for Inspection can be found in the General Orders.

The Social Order of the Beauceant: The S.O.O.B. was organized solely for the purpose of providing aid and sociability for Sir Knights and Ladies. Originally formed in response to a request to support the 25th Triennial Conclave of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the U.S.A. to be held in Denver, Colorado in August 1892. They were expanded in 1913 spreading across the country to provide support for our commanderies and our Ladies who support us. While many of these ladies may be members of the Order of Eastern Star, this organization is much different than Eastern Star as their sole purpose is to support Knights Templar and their Ladies. To be eligible for membership, a lady must be at least 18 years old and be either the wife, widow, mother, sister, daughter, or granddaughter of a Knights Templar, or the mother, sister, daughter, or granddaughter of a member.

In 1957 the S.O.O.B. adopted the Knights Templar Eye Foundation as their official charity and with only 54 assemblies currently meeting across the country, they have donated over 1.5 Million dollars in support of our great philanthropy. There is no better way for a Lady to show her support for a Sir Knight or for his Commandery than to be part of this supportive organization. We have 5 assemblies currently in Ohio located in Cleveland, East Liverpool, Finlay, Warren, and Westerville, many of which meet the same time as the Commandery that meets in their location. Much like our own Order they are decreasing in membership each year. Let us support the organization that is dedicated to supporting us and encourage the Ladies in our lives to consider being part of this worth-while group. By making them stronger we will only in turn increase our own strength and improve the Templar experience for all we meet.

Easter Sunrise Service: The Easter Sunrise Service in Alexandria, Virginia is one of the most momentous and enjoyable times I have had as a Knights Templar. Taking place at the impressive George Washington Memorial just north of King Street in Alexandria it is a magnificent sight when Christian Knights from across the country assemble to praise God in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ. It is important that Ohio be well represented, and I would like to ask all Sir Knights to consider making the trip to Alexandria to be with us this coming Easter to march in full Templar uniform and assemble on the steps of the memorial. This year, instead of marching up Shooters Hill, we will line up in the parking lot for a much easier walk to the front steps of the building so that those who would not be able to march up the hill may participate with us.

I am also planning to arrange for the Sir Knights of Ohio to participate in a wreath laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown soldier the Saturday before Easter Sunday at Arlington National Ceremony. Please join us while we witness the changing of the guard and honor the falling veterans of our great nation by placing a wreath from Ohio at the Tomb. If you have never been there, this alone is worth the trip to Alexandria. More information to come as we are trying to negotiate a room block specifically for Ohio to stay right in Old Town Alexandria which is sure to be a great experience for all.

Masonic Youth Organizations: It is important to remember most of the members in Masonic youth organizations are the families of our members who we should all support. There are very few things our children, grandchildren and their friends can get involved in that focus on them being successful and learning the values that will prepare them for the future. It is in each of our best interests to encourage the next several generations to consider this opportunity to experience what our Masonic youth organizations have to offer. In addition, our fraternity needs to do all we can to develop well skilled, knowledgeable leaders for the future, not only for our Masonic Organizations but also for our localities, state, and nation. I therefore encourage all to seek out our children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and their friends and encourage them to become a part of Ohio DeMolay, Ohio Job's Daughters and/or Ohio Rainbow. Each of these groups have opportunities to develop leadership at the local, state and even international levels and provide a unique experience for our youth that could benefit all of us for generations to come.

Also, if you are looking for an opportunity to promote a positive future for our fraternity, what better way than to directly work with our children, their children, and future generations of Masons to ensure a solid foundation for the journey ahead. Our Masonic Youth Organizations need knowledgeable, positive thinking, encouraging adults that are willing to dedicate their time to the young family members of our own members. If earnestly looking to make a difference for our future, you will not find a more worthwhile cause then to become an Advisor in one of our youth organizations. In addition, if there is not a youth organization near you, maybe now is a good time to sponsor a new chapter, bethel, or assembly where your Lodge, Chapter or Commandery meet.

Holy Day Observances: The observance of traditional Christian Holy Days remains an important part of what the Christian faith is all about and is the foundation of who we are as Knights Templar. Through our required observances of Christmas, Easter, and Ascension Day we establish a symbolic connection between the Sir Knights of today and the Christian Knights of our historical past. Each Commandery in Ohio is required to observe our Christian Holy Days with an appropriate service or event which may be done at a stated conclave, as a special event where our ladies, families, friends, and guests may participate, by attending a service at a local church in Templar uniform, or a combination of these together.

Holy Land Pilgrimage: The Knights Templar Holy Land Pilgrimage truly emphasizes the foundation of what we stand for as Christian Knights. What better experience for any Christian than an 11-day program in Israel to see and experience the Holy Land? This is a journey I hope myself to someday experience. This is an effective way to truly invest in Christian discipleship and I encourage all Sir Knights and Ladies to support this great program in any way that you may be able. Donations received by the Grand Commandery of Ohio for the Holy Land Pilgrimage directly determines how many Christian Ministers we can sponsor each year.

This program provides three opportunities to experience a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The first is for Christian Ministers where local commanderies may nominate or sponsor a Christian Minister on an expense paid study pilgrimage in Israel for 11 days. A commandery may send a nomination form to the Grand Commandery Holy Land Pilgrimage Committee to be considered or can elect to fully sponsor the nominated Christian Minister for the pilgrimage. There is also an *in the footsteps of Jesus Holy Land Pilgrimage* which is open to all Sir Knights, their Ladies, friends, and guests where each person is responsible for the cost of the trip. In addition, there is a Knight Templar Holy Land Pilgrimage for Seniors (and those with mild mobility issues) where the schedule is modified to involve a little less walking and climbing.

We are very proud to have two of our own, Sir Knights Duane A. Kemerley and David M. Snyder (Co-Chairman of the Grand Commandery of Ohio Holy Land Pilgrimage Committee), who actively lead this great initiative by the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America. Once again Sir Knights from Ohio are willing to lead a well worth-while cause and these two Sir Knights do it extremely well. It would be great if each Commandery in Ohio could show their support by nominating a well deserving Christian Minister to take part in this amazing opportunity.

Competitive Drill: Having a Drill Team demonstrates the proficiency and skill of the Sir Knights of a Commandery. It builds comradery and teamwork within the ranks of our members and helps us to improve in the knowledge of our tactics as well as our uniform specifications so we will always look impressive and function as a team. Drill Teams can be as small as 7 Sir Knights and is a great way for the Sir Knights to work together as well as compete against the other commanderies in the state. Having a drill team should be the goal of every commandery in Ohio.

Each year at the Grand Conclave in October is a chance to compete to be the best in Ohio. On Saturday morning the drill competition takes place and at the Saturday evening banquet drill bars are provided to each team for the members to proudly wear on their uniforms. Awards are also presented to the top drill teams based on a point system in each drill classification. For those that are interested there is also a drill competition at the Grand Encampment Triennial every three years to compete nationally.

Ritual Competition: I personally feel Ohio is the absolute best in performing the ritualistic work of our order. Not only are our Sir Knights proficient in the ritual but they provide an incredible experience for those who are worthily selected to enter our ranks. It is not surprising that our ritual competition at our Grand Conclave has set the bar for other jurisdictions to follow. On Saturday morning at the Grand Conclave each year Sir Knights may demonstrate their proficiency in selected areas of the ritual for a chance to be named the best in Ohio. The top three are selected from each area of the competition for recognition at the Saturday evening Grand Conclave Awards Banquet. There are many Sir Knights in Ohio that do truly inspiring ritual work worthy of recognition. I encourage you to come and take your rightful place among the best ritualists in Ohio and compete to be the best of the best.

Ritual and Tactics: It is important that the proficiency and performance of our beautiful orders continue to be conferred with the highest possible standards. Therefore, a strict observance of our Ritual and Tactics is expected. The Commandery Orders are the most impressive in Freemasonry. It is our duty and responsibility to provide the best possible work we can so that every new knight receives the inspiring Templar experience he deserves.

Public, Civic, and Patriotic Activities: Appearing in public in our Templar uniform provides opportunity to show others who we are and what we stand for. It is important to be mindful of the purpose of wearing our uniform when posting colors, marching in a parade, forming lines, attending a church service, Christmas Observance, Easter Observance, Ascension Day Observance, or when standing Honor Guard to honor one of our own, or other special activity. By wearing our uniform for these events, we show respect to God, Our Country, and Our Fraternity. The uniform shows we stand together united in Christian and Fraternal unity and that we are here for each other in the good times for celebration as well as hard times such as saying goodbye to one of our fallen. Sir Knights, wear the Templar uniform with pride and participate in all that we can so the world will know the honor and integrity of our order and fellow fraters will know we stand together.

Knights Templar Eye Foundation: Sponsored by the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America with a mission *to improve vision through research, education, and supporting access to care*, the Knights Templar Eye Foundation is without a doubt one of our greatest Masonic charities. Since its inception, the Foundation has expended over \$156 million on research, patient care, and education. Research grants totaling more than \$28 million have been awarded to researchers working in the fields of pediatric ophthalmology and ophthalmic genetics.

The Ohio Masonic Home: Part of the mission of our Ohio Masonic Home is to *help people age respectfully*. The goal of all three campuses located in Springfield, Waterville, and Medina is to deliver exceptional experiences that make community members feel like family. In addition, the Ohio Masonic Home Resource Center provides a wide variety of resources and services which contribute to sustaining the health, happiness and independence of individuals and their families in the best location, whether that be their home, one of our campuses, or elsewhere. Please continue to support the work of the Ohio Masonic Home.

I am proud to say in October 2019 the Grand Commandery of Ohio reached a status of every Knights Templar in Ohio being a 100% Life Sponsor of the Knights Templar Eye Foundation. Even more so, with special thanks to the generosity of Forest City Commandery No. 40, in 2021 every Knights Templar in Ohio became a 200% Life Sponsor of the Knights Templar Eye Foundation. I am happy to say this Templar philanthropy is well supported by the Sir Knights and Ladies of Ohio and I encourage all to keep up the generous support that is making such a remarkable difference in the lives of so many.

Sir Knights, thank you for the opportunity to serve you as Grand Commander in YOUR Grand Commandery. I am both honored and humbled to serve you as the Grand Commander of Ohio in the greatest and largest Knights Templar jurisdiction in the world. I sincerely look forward to working together with you in an effort to ensure a great Templar experience for all that we encounter. Remember, they may forget what we said, they may even forget what we did, but they will never forget the way we made them feel. I ask you to join me in a commitment to focus on courtesy, hospitality, and most importantly creating an experience that all can cherish and appreciate. Sir Knights, I ask you to "Answer the Call".

Sincerely and fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George Edmiston III". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent initial "G" and a long, sweeping underline.

George Edmiston III, KCT
Right Eminent Grand Commander
Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Ohio