



“Let your light so shine”

The symbol of the Cross and the Crown together is also known as the symbol of Christ the King. The cross passing through a crown symbolizes the reward in heaven (the crown) coming after the trials in this life (the cross). The crown is a symbol of honor and power. The cross always represents Jesus.

The blue circle of stars represents eternal unity, solidarity and harmony. This is to signify that we should all be firmly united in our pursuit of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth.

My theme duplicates one by a recent Grand Commander – this was purely coincidental. I unwittingly duplicated it. But I find that this theme, along with some of the other recent themes, are all highly worthy and intertwined.

I believe that we should always exemplify the qualities of Service, Integrity, and Excellence in all we do – a theme of another recent Grand Commander.

We need to always soar aloft, and aim high – and resolve to never stoop to lowering our standards just because it may be more expedient. Strive for perfection! When the standards are lowered, so is the goal; aim low, and that’s where you will go.

It is not always easy, but as Annie Oakley eloquently said: “Aim at a high mark and you will hit it. No, not the first time, nor the second, and maybe not the third. But keep on aiming and keep on shooting, for only practice will make you perfect!”

We, as Templars, are the shining stars and the epitome of Christian York Rite Masonry. As such, we should, as we have heard repeatedly in our ritual, ever act and walk as such, in both our public and private life. We never know when someone is watching us.

My first exposure to Masonic Templary was at a Masonic event, shortly after becoming a Mason. A group of sharp-looking Sir Knights performed a Presentation of Colors. They made such an impression that I vowed to one day become one of them.

Thanks to those Sir Knights, letting their light so shine, I am here today as your Grand Commander.

Strive to be a star – and let *your* light so shine.

Much of my program is the continuation to that of those of my predecessors. I wish to thank each of the Past Grand Commanders for their dedication and effort, working for this, the greatest Grand Commandery in the Grand Encampment. And for their mentorship. Their leadership and foresight have been exemplary, and I can only hope to be found worthy to follow in their footsteps. To the Past Grand Commanders: I have, as have others, been watching you, and learning by your shining example.

MEMBERSHIP:

Membership is, of course, our most important priority. Without new members we as an organization will cease to exist in short order. This is a painful reality and one that none of us wants to see come to pass. If we cannot arrest the unfavorable trends in membership, we will be looking at a vastly different reality in the not-too-distant future.

SK David Kern has done a fantastic job as our State Membership Chairman over the last couple years, and I look forward to being able to work with Dave moving forward. SK Kern may be the Ohio membership chair, but each Division chair, indeed each and every Sir Knight, must ALL be focused on membership.

I request that each division within the Grand Commandery of Ohio to conduct a York Rite Festival in conjunction with other York Rite bodies in an effort to continue the outstanding success of the York Rite Festivals that were conducted during the previous Templar year. In the past I was not a proponent of Festivals. I believed, and still do, to an extent, that being Created a Sir Knight should be a very personal experience. I fell into the camp that something is lost when knighted as part of a class. I have since come to accept, and realize, the importance of festivals. One memory comes to mind: I was the product of the [1st?] Grand Masters Class back in 2002. I must tell you my experience, even though I was watching an exemplar, was memorable. The work was performed in an exemplary manner by great ritualists – so very impressive that I wanted to learn and experience more. A festival, performed by experienced, highly motivated, and knowledgeable Sir Knights that perform ritual well can be, and is, a very moving experience. One that is ‘worth the money’ that the candidate pays. And, hopefully, will make them want to come back and be a member of such an outstanding, impressive organization.

In addition to our recruiting of new members, SK Kern has proposed an aggressive program to reinstate as many Sir Knights as possible. This program will heavily involve the efforts of the Eminent Commanders, Recorders, and Deputy Division Commanders. I ask each of you to assist in this effort as much as you can. This past year we did fairly good at knighting's, not so much at reinstatement – there is much room for improvement in this regard.

To accomplish new member and reinstatement goals, this year we are trying a new incentive program. Each Division that exceeds their goal for new knighting's, in a combined effort of the Commanderies across their Division, will receive \$150 payable to the CTA for use for a celebratory Division-wide function for the Sir Knights and Ladies. In addition to that, an equal amount will be given for exceeding goals for reinstatements. The hope is that this will foster an environment of working together for a common goal, and increase comradery and teamwork between the Commanderies within each Division. After all, we are all in this together.

The final, and ongoing phase of the membership program is retention! Each Commandery is charged with making stated conclave interesting – not just reciting minutes and paying bills. Involve the new Sir Knights – as well as the 'older' ones. Hold education programs. Have activities, hopefully activities that involve the Ladies. My observation has been that the strongest Commanderies have an active Ladies Auxiliary – keep the Ladies happy and they will continue to allow us to 'come out to play'. Officers: Seek help from your members to plan activities – golf outings, picnics, dinners out, ball game trips...the list of activities a Commandery can do together is endless. We need to keep our existing Sir Knights engaged, and make them want to come back. Give them something to do!

PUBLIC, CIVIC, AND PATRIOTIC ACTIVITIES

There is nothing better than showing others who we are and what we stand for than appearing in public in our Templar Uniform. It is important to be mindful of this purpose of wearing the 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 for a fallen Sir Knight. By wearing our uniform for these events, we show respect to God, Country, and our beloved Fraternity. Sir Knights, wear the Templar Uniform with pride and participate in all that we can in order that the world will know the honor and integrity of our Order, and fellow Fraters will know we stand together. Who knows, you may make such an impression that a petitioner may approach you.

DIVISION COMPETITION:

I intend to continue the competition for the Grand Commanders Trophy to the Division which has the highest overall increase in membership by measuring both knighting's and reinstatements. This metric will include aspects of both recruiting and retention. The trophy will be presented to the winning division at the Grand Conclave in October 2024 and will remain in the possession of that division until it is presented to next year's winner in October of 2025.

YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS:

REPGC Olson has done an outstanding job of supporting our Masonic youth organizations during the past year and I congratulate him on his dedication to our youth! I fully intend to continue to support these young men and women. I intend to appoint knowledgeable Sir Knights and ladies to represent me as my personal representatives to each of our Masonic youth organizations and to coordinate membership and scholarship activities between each of these organizations and the Grand Commandery of Ohio. In addition to the funds that I have requested from the Grand Commandery, I encourage each Commandery to support their local organizations of DeMolay International, The International Order of Rainbow for Girls and Job's Daughters International.

INSPECTIONS:

Inspections should be an opportunity to excel and celebrate a day of camaraderie and friendship with our fellow Knights Templar and their ladies. Inspection day should be fun and an exciting opportunity to be with old friends and make new ones. The only person we need to impress on inspection day is the candidate. Keep your records in order, learn your ritual, know your tactics, and pay attention to detail and everyone will have a successful inspection. I look forward to seeing as many of you as I can throughout the inspection season.

TRAVEL AND VISITATIONS:

I plan to travel as much as we can reasonably accomplish, including representing Ohio at our sister jurisdictions, and at the Grand Encampment Triennial. Lady Debbie and I plan to attend the East Central Department Conference, and be at the Easter Sunrise Service in DC, where we hope to be able to deposit a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. I scheduled myself to visit fourteen Commandery Inspections, two in each division. In between these events and other Masonic obligations, I just may pop in at random stated conclaves. Ambitious schedule, but with God's Blessing we will accomplish this goal. Lady Debbie and I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible during our travels during the coming year.

I realize that I will not be able to attend every function that I am invited to, but I will do my best. In order to ensure that the Grand Commander is represented at as many functions as possible, I may have to appoint Liaisons or Proxies to represent me at functions that I am unable to attend.

EASTER SUNRISE SERVICE:

One of the highlights of my time as a Knights Templar is the annual opportunity to participate in the Easter Sunrise Service at the George Washington Memorial in Alexandria VA. Lady Debbie and I have made that trip many, many times – Each time it is a humbling and an awe-inspiring experience. I have

already booked a block of hotel rooms at Embassy Suites in Alexandria for Easter weekend and I would be thrilled to call the hotel and ask to have that number increased. I would love to see a huge contingent from Ohio present this year. I am asking as many Sir Knights as possible to please make the trip and support this incredible event. You will not be disappointed.

In addition to the Easter Sunrise Service, I have scheduled a wreath laying ceremony once again at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. The solemnity and reverence of this ceremony is one of the most impressive experiences that I have ever had the privilege to participate in. Witnessing the wreath laying and the changing of the guard is well worth the trip to VA. Please join Lady Debbie and me for this unforgettable experience.

OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES:

I expect each officer within the Grand Commandery of Ohio to conduct himself with professionalism and decorum at all times. Never forget that the positions that we occupy are a privilege granted to each of us by the Sir Knights of Ohio. We do not occupy our current positions as a result of any previous right or promise. The Sir Knights of Ohio have graciously allowed us to serve them, and they can take away that privilege at any time that they see fit. Always remember that we serve the Sir Knights of Ohio, they do NOT serve us.

THE OHIO MASONIC HOME:

I ask that we all continue to support the important work of the Ohio Masonic Home and its mission to help people age gracefully. The three campuses of the Ohio Masonic Home along with the Resource Center allow both residents and non-residence to enjoy health, happiness, and independence. Please continue to support the Ohio Masonic Home and the resolute people who make it such a success. Thank you.

THE SOCIAL ORDER OF THE BEAUCEANT:

There are currently five assemblies of the SOOB in Ohio. They are located in Cleveland, East Liverpool, Finlay, Warren, and Westerville. I thank each and every member of these assemblies for the outstanding support that they provide to the Grand Commandery of Ohio, and I would like to encourage the creation of additional assemblies in other areas of the state.

HOLY LAND PILGRIMAGE:

Sir Knights and ladies, we in the state of Ohio are blessed with two of the most dedicated, knowledgeable, and hardworking ambassadors of the Holy Land Pilgrimage Program in the country. REPGC David Snyder

and HPGC Duane A. Kemerley do an outstanding job in promoting, administering, and reporting on this extremely valuable and exciting program I encourage each commandery in the Grand Commandery of Ohio to actively support this program by nominating a deserving Christian Minister to participate in this once in a lifetime opportunity. Its purpose is to strengthen Christian ministry by providing an intensive travel and study program for credentialed ministers in the form of a study pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Experience tells us how much the opportunity to 'walk where Jesus walked' can positively affect the preaching, teaching, and spirituality of Christian ministers. Please look at the requirements for nominating ministers on the Knight Templar Holyland Pilgrimage web site – can tolerate the physical rigors, has years of service remaining, and has never been to the Holyland before. Of course, donations to the Grand Commandery fund to help sponsor the ministers are always welcome too!

I would also like to encourage any interested Sir Knight, lady, and guest to participate in either of the following programs. The first is the Footsteps of Jesus Holy Land Pilgrimage which is open to all Sir Knights, their Ladies, friends, and guests. Each individual participating in this experience is responsible for the cost of the trip. I would very much like to make the trip in the future – Lady Debbie and I are hoping to be able to go on this trip next year! If you are interested in either of these programs, please contact SK's Snyder or Kemerley.

KNIGHT TEMPLAR EYE FOUNDATION:

For many years, The Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America has sponsored the Knights Templar Eye Foundation. The stated mission of the KTEF is to improve vision through research, education and supporting access to care. In the past, Ohio has demonstrated an unmatched level of support for the KTEF. I ask all of you to continue to support this incredibly worthwhile charity, not just to beat Texas or to win some other challenge but because it is the RIGHT thing to do. The doctors, researchers, and staff of the KTEF depend upon our support and we need to continue to support them with our gifts. Thank you!

A reminder that the requirement to pay the KTEF Life Sponsorship is a requirement per Grand Commandery statutes. It's up to the Commanderies as to if they have this fee as part of the initiation fee – and have this in their by-laws [highly recommended], or pay it from the Commandery funds. Either way, these funds should be remitted immediately – just make sure to enter the candidate into MMS before remitting so they are properly credited for the donation.

CHRISTMAS CHARITY INITIATIVE:

This year, Lady Debbie and I plan to continue REPGC Olson's initiative of a Christmas charity program. I hope that you will all give your enthusiastic support. Lady Debbie will likely still send out cards – that is her way and I'm not even going to try to stop her – but we will make several donations to worthy charities, and again join our church as sponsors for Secret Santa gifts to disadvantaged children who have incarcerated parents.

HOLY DAY OBSERVANCES:

One of the areas where our commanderies have suffered during and since the recent pandemic is the observance of Holy Days. As restrictions are lifted and we return to our normal routines, I ask that each commandery return to the enthusiastic support of Holy Day Observances. Each commandery is required to observe Christmas, Easter, and Ascension Day. I ask that each Sir Knight along with their ladies, families, friends, and guests attend a service at a local church in Templar uniform, or a combination of these together. In addition, a special event or service may be conducted at a stated special conclave.

RITUAL COMPETITION:

For me, one of the highlights of the Grand Conclave weekend is the ritual competition. There is no doubt in my mind that the Sir Knights of Ohio set the bar for ritual work in the Grand Encampment. Our ritual competition has become the envy of other commanderies in the East Central Department and has hosted many other Grand Commanderies which have come to Ohio to observe our ritual competition. I would like to work to expand this outstanding event in the future. I encourage each Sir Knight to sign up for the Ritual Competitions and claim your well-deserved place among the best ritualists in Templary. I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible in the ritual competition next year!

COMPETITIVE DRILL:

Sir Knights, in recent years, participation in the drill competition has fallen off to the point that it has become a critical concern to me. We need to step up our game and encourage more commanderies or divisions to form drill teams and compete at our Grand Conclave. A drill team can consist of as few as seven Sir Knights and is an excellent way to build teamwork and Esprit De Corps. One of the drills is very similar to the Full Form Opening - there is no reason that we do not have many Commanderies competing in this drill. Drill increases comradery amongst the members from the association outside of the normal conclave activity of reading minutes and paying the bills. Needless to say, at inspections, it is painfully obvious when Commanderies do not perform drills. My sincere hope is to see an increase in drill teams and a huge resurgence in the drill competition at our 2024 Grand Conclave.

TRIENNIAL

In August of 2024 we will be attending the Triennial for Grand Encampment in Salt Lake City, Utah. The Dias Officers are expected to attend. Any and all Sir Knights are welcome and encouraged to attend, to observe the operation of the Grand Encampment. There will be drill competition this year, field drills only – my fervent desire is for Ohio to be represented by several drill teams, hopefully including an A-team, and bring home some trophies.

AWARDS:

As a volunteer organization, one of the most significant actions that we can take to recognize our members who have performed outstanding service is to nominate them for one of the several awards which are available to them. I highly encourage each and every Eminent Commander to nominate one Sir Knight from his Commandery for the Meritorious Service Award (MSA). This award is extremely easy to obtain for a deserving SK by filling out the MSA nomination form and submitting it to the MSA committee. There is absolutely no reason for the Eminent Commander of each Commandery not to submit a deserving SK from his commandery for this award. Procedures for the submission and presentation of the MSA are outlined in Section 1017 in the Statutes of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of the State of Ohio.

The Knights Templar Cross of Honor (KTCH): This award was created by the Grand Encampment of the United States of America and is presented by the Grand Master of the Grand Encampment. The number of KTCH awards which each Grand Commandery can present annually is based upon membership. Procedures for the nomination and awarding of the KTCH are described in section 237(b) of the Statutes of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America.

In addition to the KTCH, the Grand Encampment also awards the Companion of the Temple (COT) to our deserving ladies. If you know of a lady who you feel deserves special recognition, please submit their name to your DC and DDC and they will work to complete the nomination process.

In addition to these awards, I request that each division continue to recognize deserving Sir Knights and ladies by presenting a "Sir Knight and Lady of the Year" Award.

Sir Knights, once again I want to thank you for the opportunity to serve each of you during the upcoming Templar year. I pledge to you that I will do my best to represent you and the interests of the Grand Commandery of Ohio. I will try to visit as many of your commanderies as possible and I look forward to meeting you. I appreciate the confidence that you have bestowed on me, and I accept that honor with humility and gratitude. I understand that we have a year of challenges ahead but also a year of incredible opportunities. I ask you to join with me as I institute my program of "Let your light so shine". Please embrace that concept and join me in going above and beyond as we all strive to sustain the momentum of last year and press forward to another wonderful year for the Grand Commandery of Ohio. Thank you for your support and may God bless and look after us all.

Sincerely and respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Richard L Ganion". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

Richard L Ganion, KCT
Grand Commander