



ST. MARY THE VIRGIN

Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem

Read More About It:
Ceremonies & Meetings

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INTRODUCTION



Ceremonies & Meetings

The ceremonies of the Order are the principal means through which member Knights and Dames experience the customs and traditions that help them relate personally and directly to the original Knights Templar. The ritual is a solemn reminder of the motivation, personal sacrifice, poverty, and difficulties that constantly attended those who chose the path of knighthood for the loftiest of goals: making the Holy Land safe for pilgrims and those who maintained their places of worship.

This publication reviews the various meetings, ceremonies and rituals of the Order.

Convents & Investitures

The chief ceremonies of the Order are the Convents and Investitures (C&Is). Every effort is made to hold these ceremonies in a setting that inspires both reverence and awe and enables reflection on the meaning of involvement in the Order. The ceremony itself, and all that attends it, are carried out in the most dignified way. Optional ceremonies can be added for the purpose of enhancement and are just as solemn.



Convent ceremonies – especially large Convents where visiting dignitaries are involved – are complex. The ceremonies of the Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem require careful forethought, planning, and attention to detail for their proper execution; but the dignity of the ceremonies in the eyes of observers is only assured when Knights and Dames are careful as well to observe proper decorum at all times before, during and after the ceremonies.

Scripts are provided as a Word document on the Order’s website in 14 pitch so that it may easily be tailored for Priory/ Commandery use. A script for a Virtual Convent and Admission is also available on the website.

The components of a Convent Ceremony include the following. When investitures are included, it is referred to as a Convent & Investiture (C&I).

1. **OPENING CEREMONY** (*Mandatory*)
 - a. Procession
 - b. Passing the Sword
 - c. Opening Prayer
 - d. (Psalm 115)
 - e. Order of the Day
 - i. Installation and Investiture
 - ii. Acceptance of Transfer
 - iii. Presentation of Awards
 - iv. Promotions
 - v. Investiture into the Order of Merit
 - vi. Investiture of a New Prior
 - vii. Installation of a New Commandery
 - viii. Elevation of a Commandery to a Priory
 - ix. Investiture of a new Grand Prior
2. **INTRODUCTION OF POSTULANTS** (*Optional*)
3. **THE HISTORY** (*Mandatory*)
 - a. Historical Tradition of Knighthood
 - b. Early History
 - c. Charter of the Priory
4. **OATH** (*Mandatory*)
5. **RELIGIOUS SERVICE** (*Optional*)
6. **ACCOLADE** (*Optional*)
 - a. Preparation
 - b. Dubbing
 - c. Acceptance of New Knights and Dames
7. **TRANSFERS** (*Optional*)

8. **HONORS** (*Optional*)
 - a. Awards
 - b. Promotions
9. **ELEVATIONS AND INSTALLATION** (*Optional*)
10. **MODERN RULE** (*Mandatory*)
11. **OTHER ORDERS OF BUSINESS** (*Optional*)
12. **CLOSING** (*Mandatory*)

Additional rituals can be included in the convent ceremony. These are inserted into the script at the places noted and, in the order, prescribed within the script. These ceremonies include the following:

- a. Transfers from outside the GPUSA/Priory/Commandery
- b. Investiture into the Order of Merit
- c. Investiture of a New Prior and Priory Officers
- d. Stand-up of a new Commandery
- e. Elevation of a Commandery to Priory Status
- f. Investiture of a New Grand Prior
- g. Blessing of Insignias
- h. Investiture for a Gravely Ill Knight/Dame
- i. Prior's Prayer for a Fallen Knight or Dame

Scripts are available from the GPUSA website.

Pre-Convent Retreat

Priors and Commanders desiring to include ecumenical religious services in their ceremonies to further the spiritual growth of members are encouraged to consult with their Chaplains or the Grand Chaplain to obtain appropriate scripts for such services. Scripts for ecumenical religious services (e.g., communion or evening prayers) for use in conjunction with Convents, Investitures or Vigils may be found in the Book of Common Prayers and a wide variety of church ritual publications that are available in the religious profession.

When a full or partial retreat immediately precedes the Convent and/or Investiture, the Historical Tradition of Knighthood and the Early History of the Order may be read at the retreat and if possible, used as foci for the retreat meditations. If this is done, they may be omitted during the Convent and/or Investiture.

A period of preparation for candidates for investiture is an excellent way in which to impress the Postulants with the nature and history of the Order. One of the best vehicles to accomplish this preparation is to hold a retreat, preferably in a monastic setting, for the Postulants and priory leadership. This parallels the actual preparation for knighthood, as described by historian Thomas B. Costain in *The Three Edwards*. There, he recounts how a candidate would spend the hours prior to the accolade listening to advice from senior knights and in prayer and meditation in a chapel, standing watch over his armor. The same can be accomplished at a well-organized retreat, adding an impressive and historical tradition to the investiture ceremonies of the Priory or Commandery.



Thomas B. Costain

(May 8, 1885 – October 8, 1965) was a Canadian-American journalist who became a best-selling author of historical novels. Costain's work is a mixture of commercial history and fiction that relies heavily on historic events. His most popular novel was *The Black Rose* (1945), centered in the time and actions of Bayan of the Baarin also known as Bayan of the Hundred Eyes.

Retreat

As a verb, "retreat" dates to the early 15th century *retreten*, "to draw in, draw back, leave the extremities," also "to fall back from battle;" from *retreat* (n.) and in part from Old French *retret*, *retrait*, past participle of *retrere* "to draw back." Retreat – as meaning a "place of seclusion" – is from early 15th century. As a sense of "establishment for mentally ill persons" is from 1797. Meaning "period of retirement for religious self-examination" is from 1756.

The retreat itself can be of varying lengths. It could begin the evening before, and last until a few hours before the actual convent and investiture. Or it could be scheduled to only take a few hours, prior to the convent. In either case, it should offer the Postulant a quiet time in a religious setting, the better to meditate on the nature of knighthood and his or her commitment to Christ.

A Retreat Master should be appointed to orchestrate the activities and control the timing of events. He or she is the one who welcomes the Postulants, explains the nature of a silent retreat, signals the times for meditations and offices (if included), conducts the services, gives at least one of the meditations and concludes the silent time with a few final words. If possible, the Retreat Master should have some religious training.

The shorter retreat (it shouldn't be less than two hours) could incorporate the three meditations suggested above and give the Postulants some time, preferably in a chapel or church setting, to meditate and pray in silence.

It should be emphasized that the use of a pre-convent retreat will add to the spiritual richness of all that follows and can be a valuable addition to the life of a priory. Although the retreat itself usually will not include all those who later take part in the convent and investiture, the priories that have included this monastic preparation can attest to the enthusiasm of all those who did participate.

If a longer retreat is chosen, it could incorporate a variety of readings and meditations as well as provide a more monastic ambiance for the candidates. It could begin with a low-key reception and then go into a quiet time, including a number of the monastic daily offices, such as *Matins* (morning prayer), *Diurnum* (Noon prayer) and *Vespers* (evening prayer) into the schedule. Playing Gregorian chants in the background can add to the atmosphere. Simple meals may be served (bread, fruit, cheese and wine), during which readings from the writings of St. Bernard of Clairvaux follow the monastic tradition, with participants still observing silence. A lay reader should be appointed by the Retreat Master.

During the retreat, there should be at least two or three meditations, short and thoughtful presentations given by senior members of the priory. The subject matter of the meditations can vary, but could include the following:

1. The History of the Templars. This talk either can touch on the long history of the Order, from the rationale of its formation through its moments of strength to its ultimate disbandment and continued life underground, or could dwell in greater depth on one special moment in its history.
2. The Spirituality of the Templars. This meditation could present the spiritual side of the Order, Christian heritage, and develop themes dealing with individual religious practices.
3. The Future of the Templars. This subject could present the Postulants with an insight into the present worldwide activities of the Order and ask the listeners to visualize what we might be able to do, as Templars, in the future years the better to fulfill the calling.



The Vigil by John Pettie, exhibited 1884. The design of the Church Army Chapel, Blackbeath, was influenced by The Vigil, the spire and east window carrying the same shape and symbolism as the sword in this painting, on exhibition in the Tate Gallery.

Vigil

There were two forms of vigil which were performed in correspondence to knighthood in the Middle Ages. The first was a standard vigil, a trial run for the lesser-experienced combatants on the night before a tourney or joust. The other was the ceremonious Vigil of Arms, which a squire was required to keep the night before he became a knight.

Originally, during the Dark Ages, knighting was done on the battlefield, or shortly thereafter. If a squire performed some act of high bravery, he was knighted by his liege-lord directly after the day's battle, with no pomp or ceremony. Around the year AD 1200, the Catholic Church took over the

dubbing of knights and imposed its rituals and obligations on the event, turning the knighting into both a ceremony and a sacrament.

Under the Church's two-day ritual, the candidate for knighthood took a symbolic bath, donned symbolic garments, and stood or knelt for ten to twelve hours in a night-long sacred watch, or at prayer. At dawn, mass was said in front of an audience of nobles. The candidate's sponsors then presented him to his feudal lord, and gave him his armor and weaponry after a prayer and blessing had been said over each piece of equipment. The soon-to-be knight's sponsors attached his spurs. Then he knelt before his feudal lord and swore homage before he was officially granted the rank of knight.

Any squire who had been deemed worthy of receiving his spurs (hence the saying "to earn one's spurs") and who had obtained a worthy sponsor, could be offered knighthood once he had undergone his Vigil of Arms. Every part of a vigil had significance, and no part of it could be skipped, or the candidate would be declared unworthy of the honor and responsibilities of knighthood. Every action of the candidate, during the vigil, must reflect spiritual purity and integrity, and his worthiness of the rewards of Paradise.

The purpose of the Vigil of Arms was to purify the future knight and always remind him that his duty to God and Church superseded all worldly duties or possessions. After that, he was responsible to the duty imposed on him by his liege-lord, then by his sponsors. He was also to champion the poor and misused, and to hold all of these things above himself.

Priorities are encouraged to develop a Vigil ceremony. Components should include prayer(s) and meditation(s). A Virtual Vigil script is provided on the GPUSA website.

Meetings

The Order is not a secret one. It has no lodge rooms as such, and holds its various Convents, meetings, Priory Installations and Investitures in a variety of places. Formal Convents of the Order, when possible, should be held in a Church.

Committee meetings for the purpose of conducting Grand Priory, Priory, or Commandery committee business may be held at any time and at any appropriate location. A formal record (though not necessarily verbatim) of all such business meetings should be written, retained, and archived with the Grand Archivist.



It is the custom in the Grand Priory and some Priories to meet and socialize in semi-public rooms at local clubs, such as the Cosmos Club in Washington, D.C. and the Germania Club in Chicago, or at military Officers' clubs, since many of the Knights and Dames are members of such establishments.

The Grand Prior, as well as the several local Priors and Commanders, may invite such non-member ladies and gentlemen as seems fit and proper to attend a Convent and Investiture. The press may be admitted witnessing ceremonies where appropriate. The actual details of the Order of Convent may be observed and heard by the public, but only the Grand Prior, Grand Secretary or Grand Avocat shall have power to disseminate a copy in writing to anyone other than a duly authorized State or Federal Agency, which may have a copy on proper request. The New Jersey Corporate Charter, as amended, is a public document; and its pertinent provisions may be disseminated to prospective members or such other persons (including members of the press) as the Grand Prior or the local Prior shall direct.

General meetings of the Priory or Commandery may include the following agenda items:

Opening Prayer

Welcome & Introductions

Deputy Grand Prior's Comments

Prior's Comments

Officer Reports – Chancellor, Inspector, Treasurer, Secretary, Aumonier, Avocat,
Master of Postulants, Chaplain, Registrar, Knight Protector/Marshall, Sword Bearer

Old Business

New Business

Next Meeting

Adjournment

Closing Prayer

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