
RENEWING TEMPLARY COMMANDERY INSPECTIONS TO BUILD PROFICIENCY

The Opportunity We Face

During a 2023 Department Conference, the Grand Master, Sir Knight David J. Kussman, noted that there were several Grand Commanderies which were unable to confer the Orders because they lacked Knights capable of conferring the Orders. This has led to the untenable and unsustainable situation where candidates for the Orders are required to have the work conferred in other jurisdictions or the Orders are conferred not from memory but from reading the work from the Ritual book. While the former is certainly preferable to the latter, it is clearly in violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of Section 176 of the Constitution, Statutes, and Decisions of the Grand Encampment to fail to create at least one new Knight in a 12-month period.

This presents us with several opportunities. One opportunity is to address methods we might invoke in order to encourage greater study and proficiency in our Ritual work, ensuring that every Commandery, and thus every Grand Commandery, has the ability and the resources to create new knights which we so desperately need if we are to reverse the downward trend in membership and provide those new Knights with the high quality ritualistic work to which they are entitled and we have long claimed is a core principle of our being the “premier Masonic body.” It is this opportunity addressed here.

Recovering Our Ritual Proficiency as Commanderies

Almost all Grand Jurisdictions have established an inspection system, often led by a Grand Inspector General, and some jurisdictions have Grand Instructors General who often are assigned the task of instructing and evaluating the Ritual and Tactics of the jurisdiction. Clearly, not all these programs are created and executed equally given the current state of the Order.

When there is an inspection, it is to identify neglect. That is, the inspector’s duty is to identify where the inspected organization is not meeting the minimum standards so that the inspected organization can correct, retrain, and improve in its assigned duties. While conducting that in section, the inspector frequently will identify areas or individuals which exceed or far exceed the minimum standards. These areas or individuals are frequently identified in post-inspection reports and held up to other organizations as examples of how to perform a given task well.

Inspection and evaluation are one step in recovering our Ritual proficiency. Grand Commanders should expect an inspection and evaluation system that accurately reports the ability of each Commandery under his supervision is able to properly and efficiently open and close using the Ritual of the Grand Encampment from memory in Full or 10-Man form as well as confer all three Orders with each Commandery's own members in the key stations (that is, High Priest, Sovereign Master, Companion Conductor, Prince Chancellor, Prince Master of the Palace in Illustrious Order of Red Cross, Prior and Chaplain in Order of Malta short form or Prior, Chaplain, Marshal, and Banner lectures in Full Form, and Commander, Prelate, Senior Warden, and Junior Warden in the Order of the Temple). Certainly, no printed Rituals and minimum prompting is the expectation of proficiency. The intent here is to ensure that the *Commandery* can do the work necessary to conduct its business and create new Knights. This means the Ritual work of the Orders may or may not be conferred by the officer elected to a given position. The candidate deserves to see the best possible Ritual work, and that means using our most gifted ritualists where possible. No officer should consider this as a reason not to strive for personal excellence, nor should the Commanderies elect only outstanding Ritualists to serve as their leaders. Every man has his own gifts and skills, and not every man is both an outstanding ritualist and outstanding administrator.

In order to improve these across the Grand Encampment and share best practices, the Department Commanders should be tasked with collecting all written material related to inspections and evaluations within their Departments and preparing a report for the Grand Master describing each jurisdiction's inspection and evaluation process, what aspects of the jurisdiction's process is working well, what areas are failing to achieve positive results, and most importantly, what are the "best practices" among the several Grand Commanderies of the Department that are worthy of consideration by other Grand Commanderies within the Grand Encampment. These reports should be provided to the Grand Master no less than 180 days following the close of the Triennial Conclave. The Grand Master should then have the reports reviewed, summarized, and shared among the Department Commanders and Grand Commanderies

A Model for Building Proficiency while Improving Inspections

In my military days, "full and complete staff work" was one of the many buzz phrases. Most often, it was used in the context of someone identifying an issue or problem (or coming up with some "bright idea"), and that person being told, "Hey, great idea. Why don't you write something up on how to make it happen?" In that spirit, here's one possible approach to help build up an inspection program in a Grand Commandery that actually helps build up individual proficiency along the way.

Since it is difficult, if not impossible in some jurisdictions, to inspect each Commandery three times in a year (once in each Order), a "best practice" is to have a rotating cycle for inspecting one Order every year. To the extent possible, Commanderies should have their assigned Order staggered, so that in each region/division/battalion has all three Orders covered. This way, there is an opportunity for neighboring Commanderies to assist one another (if needed) in conferring the Orders and the Grand Commander can be assured that each Order can be conferred in each part of his jurisdiction. Also, the inspection sequence

should be standardized so that an officer will know when he starts in a particular station what Order will be “his” when he is installed as Commander several years down the road. That way, he’ll be able to prepare for that role in increments before assuming the station. In some jurisdictions, the “inspection Order” is the Order of the Temple every time, and the Red Cross and Malta are rarely, if ever, evaluated. So, if there is a three-year inspection cycle, every Order in every Commandery can be evaluated every three years.

Here's a sample table to show how it might work in practice, assumes the line is progressive starting at Sentinel and that the cycle begins in 2025 to allow everyone to gear up for the new process:

Year	Order Inspected	Officer from Year A who would be Sovereign Master/OPrior/Commander
A (2025)	Illustrious Order of the Red Cross	Commander
B (2026)	Malta	Generalissimo
C (2027)	Temple	Captain General
A (2028)	Illustrious Order of the Red Cross	Senior Warden
B (2029)	Malta	Junior Warden
C (2030)	Temple	Sword Bearer
A (2031)	Illustrious Order of the Red Cross	Standard Bearer
B (2032)	Malta	Warder
C (2033)	Temple	Sentinel

In this example, each officer would be focusing on learning (a) the presiding officer part for “his” inspection year and (b) one other part in each of the other two Orders. Add in your Treasurer, Recorder, and a couple of sideliners and you now have a team of 13 Knights each working on at least two parts in every Order. In a year or two, we should have almost all Commanderies up to speed and able to confer all three Orders, at least filling the major stations with their own members. To prepare for each member’s inspection year, and to spread the work of memorizing a bit, one might consider breaking each Order into smaller sections. For example, the Sentinel may be expected to present the Flag tribute during his year as Sentinel, and then add one parts working backward in his time in the Second Division, so that when he is Junior Warden, he has mastered everything for the Commander after the knighting. As Junior Warden, he might focus on the third section, Senior Warden the second section, and as Captain General, the first section of the Order, conferring those sections when the Order of the Temple is conferred in his Commandery.

By doing this, he is ready to confer the entire Order as the Generalissimo to prepare for his inspection year. This pattern can apply also to the Orders of Red Cross and Malta as well.

Why Inspections Are Necessary

No one likes inspections. We want to think our work is tight and we have a solid grasp on the words, tactics, and delivery of our Orders. However, we can always improve in our work, and having an independent evaluation by an outsider helps us get clear feedback and identify areas where we might be overlooking excellence or (heaven forbid!) might actually be doing something incorrectly.

Preparing for inspections is always nerve-wracking, even when there is no real “penalty” for failure. We don’t want to hear we aren’t the greatest. That’s human nature. But I can honestly say that there is a great feeling that comes when it’s over, everyone stands back knowing they did their best, and the inspector says, “Great job, gentlemen!” Of course, there will be mistakes. We’re human beings. However, because we took time to prepare, and that preparation was focused on being our absolute best and ensuring our candidate-now-new-Knight, we can bask in the pleasure of a job well done.