

Grand Commandery of Massachusetts and Rhode Island January 2024 NEWS



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Grand Commander

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A Full Church verses an Empty Church

Greetings Sir Knights,

I want to tell you about an experience I had leading up to the Annual Grand Conclave of Massachusetts and Rhode Island. On the Sunday prior to the Conclave, I went to church to ask Gods guidance in my future endeavors. I went to my family church that I grew up in. While gathering myself and my daughter to head to church, I realized that we were cutting it close. In the past, when my family would go to church, if you got there less than twenty minutes before the start of service, you would be parking a good distance away and standing at the back of the church. While I knew attendance had been down, and sadly I must admit, I had not been to my church since before the pandemic, I didn't expect what I found.

You see, we pulled up to the church five minutes before services were to start. I figured we would have to park on the side road. To my shock, the single row of Fifteen parking spots in front of the church had only three cars in it, with one across the street and one in front of the church's hall. Upon entering the church, we found 7 other parishioners and the priest present. This was a far departure from what I remember

growing up or what I saw only four years ago. What had changed? The message was still the same, the purpose unaltered, the time of the service was the same, so what was different?

After the service, was the traditional coffee hour, and we were welcomed with open arms by those present, only two of which I knew from my childhood. We were treated as old friends or family, which is what you would expect. I saw nothing on the surface that indicated why things would be the way they were. Finally, I said to myself, like many of us do, it is just the times.... And we departed.

On our drive home, I explained to my daughter how things used to be and how people were more involved. I thought this was the same everywhere. When we were getting close to home, we passed another church. The scene there was different, however. The parking lot was full! Cars were waiting to find parking spots and people walking up from the streets to go in. To say that I was confused would be an understatement. I thought that this issue was everywhere. This made me pause to think about it, to wonder why the difference between the two churches. What would cause a church to be full while another almost empty. The messages are the same, the faith was the same. This made me come to another thought, why do some Commanderies have strong support and others not?

After thinking about this I came up with a few thoughts. The similarities didn't matter. The differences mattered. Where they are now, didn't matter, but how did they get to where they are mattered. The empty church was welcoming and warm, but were they always that way, or was this a correction? If it was, do people know that things have improved? The full church, was it always that way, or did they build it? Did they always have a strong program supporting their services?

These are the questions we also need to ask ourselves as Sir Knights. Is our Commandery well attended or not so much? Is your Commandery welcoming and warm to those who belong and visit? Does your commandery have programs that give your Sir Knights a greater feeling of purpose and provide a perceived worth to their membership? Finally, has it been that way for a long time or only since an event?

These are questions that we all need to ask ourselves. Templary is a unique and great opportunity for every Christian Mason. We can decide to make our Commandery Full or Empty. We can decide to make it better if it has gone in a way, we do not find beneficial. We can improve communication and outreach to inform those who no longer attend of what has improved. We can reach out to our brothers who have not joined and let them know what we have to offer.

These are the questions, and the decisions each of us needs to make. I know for my church, there were issues from time to time that hurt attendance in the past. Those issues may be fixed now, but has the word spread of this correction. Has anyone made the effort to spread the word to those who have been away.....Time will tell.

For every Sir Knight I will ask of you the following, do you have a full or empty Commandery? If it is empty, do you know how you got there? If you do, is there a plan to change the perception and situations and have you communicated those changes? If you have a full commandery, do you share your programs with other commanderies, to help aide and assist?

Our Grand Commandery is working to provide more tools for your use to strengthen your commanderies. Leadership and Management programs, Grand Commanders Award, travel initiatives and educational tools are all available or being made available. If you have a question, reach out to other commanderies that you know are doing well, or your Division Commanders. The first step in fixing anything is asking the right questions.

We as Christian Knights must go out to help aide and assist our fellow Sir Knights. I ask you to take the lesson from the full and empty churches, to ask the questions you need to ask, and seek out the opportunities to make your commandery full again!

James Ian Ogilvie
Grand Commander