

**Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order  
of Saint John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta**

**SOME PROTOCOL MATTERS:**

**CEREMONIAL: OBSEQUIES**

**1. General.**

1.1 A member of the First Class of the Order of Malta is a professed religious in a religious order of the Catholic Church. Therefore, a Mass or ceremony for such a person is primarily a ceremony of the Order. A Mass or service for a person who is member of the Second Class or Third Class of the Order may be conducted primarily as a ceremony of the Order, if that is the wish of the deceased or those responsible. Most of this Ceremonial is designed for such a service. Obsequies for a Professed Chaplain of the Order may follow these guidelines. Obsequies for a chaplain not-professed in the Order of Malta may follow these guidelines or those of his religious institute or diocese.

1.2 If the Mass or service is for a member of the Order but conducted as a normal lay funeral service, merely with the invited participation of other members of the Order of Malta, the following ceremonial must be modified within its general framework, and under the guidance of paragraph 9 below.

1.3 Participation of members of the Order of Malta in obsequies for deceased members of the Order may vary, depending on national and local traditions, customs and local diocesan practices. This Ceremonial is not yet official for the Order, but is appropriate as guidelines for Associations in the United States and for other organizations which do not have an established ceremonial for obsequies.

1.4 Pertinent obsequies include: a viewing or wake, funeral Mass, memorial Mass, burial service at graveside, and anniversary Masses.

1.5 The wishes of the deceased as expressed in the will, testament, trust or other instructions are to be implemented whenever possible. The wishes of the family or next of kin or anyone with legal rights and standing in the matter of the funeral and disposition of the remains also must be taken into full consideration in arranging the ceremonial.

1.6 Although the wishes of the family of deceased members of the First Class, Professed Knights, should be taken into consideration, of paramount importance are the instructions of the deceased, and the appropriate usage of the Order. In accordance with the Gospel, upon making profession the Professed Knight left his earthly family and followed Christ, becoming in fact a full member of the family of the Order and of the Church. Therefore the ceremonial of the Order has precedence for deceased Professed Knights.

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1.7 A responsible person of the Association, Subpriory or Priory (officer, director, master-of-ceremonies, chair of the appropriate committee) should contact the executor or next-of-kin or other person responsible for the funeral arrangements. Inquiry should be made as to whether there will be a viewing, a Mass of Christian burial, a memorial Mass and other details. It should be ascertained whether it is wished that the members of the Order: 1) attend as a group, 2) attend as a group in church robes, or 3) participate. In the case of a Professed Knight, unless he has opted otherwise in written instructions, participation in proper church robe is expected of every member of the Order in the area. Inquiry should also be made as to whether other orders or groups are being invited, and if so, who is the contact for each group. The responsible person should also contact the funeral or mortuary director to coordinate.

**2. The Mass.**

2.1 The Mass of Christian burial is said for, and in connection, with the interment of the mortal remains of the deceased. There is only one Mass of Christian burial, all other Masses are memorial Masses.

2.2 The presence of cremains, and their placement, depend on the regulations of the local Ordinary. It is strongly recommended that, at the Mass of Christian burial or a memorial Mass, the urn with the cremains should be placed in a coffin-like box covered with the flag (or pall) in the usual place of the coffin.

2.3 With the mortal remains present at the Mass of Christian burial, the use of incense, the blessing of the remains, and approved local rites and customs are proper.

2.4 The color of the vestments is in accordance with the rites of the Church, normally permitting white, violet or black. It is suggested that white be used for members of the Third Class, violet for members of the Second Class and black for members of the First Class, but these are only suggestions.

**3. Placement of the remains.**

3.1 The coffin with the mortal remains of the member is placed in the church in accordance with local custom and regulations.

3.2 The coffin of a Professed Knight, however, is always placed on a special rug directly on the floor, not raised on a bier [following the ancient noble custom: even if raised in dignity in life, always humble in death]. If transported into place on a wheeled bier, the coffin should either be lowered close to the floor, or removed and placed on the floor. This custom may also be followed for the remains of members in the Second and Third Classes of the Order, if so desired.

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3.3 If space permits, candles may be placed around the coffin. In accordance with ecclesiastical rites, the Paschal Candle should be placed on the floor at the end of the coffin toward the sanctuary. Large candlesticks may be placed on each side of the coffin. One on each side for a member of the Third Class, two on each side for a member of the Second Class and three on each side for a member of the First Class. These candles are optional, but for a Professed Knight, every effort should be made to have them.

**4. Use of the church robes by Knights or capes by Dames.**

4.1 Use by the deceased.

4.1.1 A Professed Knight should be buried in his church robe with his professed rosary in his hands, but may be cremated for good reason. The church robe and rosary should be removed before cremation.

4.1.2 Depending on the expressed wishes of the deceased, members of the Second and Third Classes may be dressed in the church robe or cape, in the working uniform of the Order, in the dress uniform of the Order, or in normal clothing. Although a person may be cremated in the church robe, it is strongly recommended that it be removed after the viewing, if there is one, and before cremation.

4.2 Use by other members.

If agreed that the members of the Order should attend in a group and in church robes, or should participate (which means in robes), the members should wear the church robe with appropriate large Cross of the Order on the neck ribbon or the large bow. The church robe may also be worn by members while they are participating in the service directly by doing readings, acting as acolytes, or the like, and even if giving the eulogy.

**5. Use of the flags of the Order.**

There are two flags of the Order. The most commonly seen and used flag is red with a white eight-pointed “Maltese” cross. It may more properly be considered as the “hospitaller” flag, or flag of the works of the Order. The official flag, or flag of sovereignty, is red with a plain white cross whose arms extend to the edges of the flag.

5.1 The hospitaller flag may be displayed on a staff or as a hanging banner during the viewing, in the sanctuary of the church during services, and at graveside, if requested.

5.2 If available, a large hospitaller flag may be used to cover the coffin in place of the pall. If there is clerical insistence, the flag may drape the coffin when it is brought into

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the church, with the regular pall replacing it when it reaches the altar railing. It may again substitute for the pall after the blessing of the deceased at the end of Mass.

5.3 For funerals of Professed Knights, additional Order flags may be hung in the church.

5.4 For funerals of Professed Knights, a large flag of sovereignty should be placed over the coffin in place of the pall. If the flag of sovereignty is not available, the hospitaller flag may be used. A regular pall should not be substituted for this flag at any time, since the Order's flag is the symbol of a religious order of the Church.

5.5 In some places and with some families, it is the custom to place on each side of the coffin square banners, each displaying one quartering of the marshalling of the family arms of the deceased. Other similar heraldic displays are permitted in accordance with local or hereditary customs.

**6. Cross of the Order, decorations, and insignia of knighthood.**

The chivalric, religious, military and civil decorations and honors of the deceased may be displayed at the viewing, and also at the Mass of Christian burial or memorial service. Adequate arrangements must be made in advance to allow this to be done properly. After the Mass they are all returned to the next of kin or trustee as directed in the last will and testament.

6.1 The Cross of the Order.

6.1.1 The large Cross of the order on neck ribbon or large bow more than merely a "decoration", it is a blessed religious symbol, the cross of membership in a religious order. As such it may be "worn" by the deceased during viewing, but must be removed before the coffin is closed.

6.1.2 If other decorations are being displayed, the Cross of the Order may be included in that display instead of being "worn" by the deceased, or it may be included in the display from the beginning.

6.2 Display of decorations.

6.2.1 The orders, decorations and honors are displayed during the viewing and the funeral or memorial service on a velvet cushion or several cushions (suggested colors: blue, red, black, purple, gold) which may rest on a small table or tables, or against the foot of the coffin.

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6.2.2 During the viewing they are usually arranged along the side of the coffin or next to it. During the Mass they are displayed at the foot of the coffin and along its sides. The highest decoration is displayed in the center, with the next highest to the right (as standing in front of the coffin with back to the coffin) and the next highest to the left, alternating in that manner. [Confer: *The Church Visible*, James-Charles Noonan, Jr., Chap. 6, Papal Honors: Laity; Burial.] For a Professed Knight, the highest are his Cross of the Order and his Cross of profession.

6.2.3 Collars or chains or decorations of especially high grade should be displayed on separate cushions.

6.2.4 No ‘decoration’ or insignia of any unrecognized or self-styled “order” should ever be displayed.

6.3 Insignia of Knighthood.

6.3.1 For Professed. The sword belt and sword, golden spurs, and professed rosary (if not buried with deceased) of a Professed Knight as well as white gloves should be placed on the flag on the coffin after it is closed for the last time. The chapeau of the Knight may also be placed there. These items remain there during the processional, Mass, recessional and at graveside. They are removed before burial. If other decorations are not being displayed, the neck Cross of the Order and the Cross of Profession may also be placed on top of the coffin, but it is preferable to display them on a cushion.

6.3.2 For others members. If a member of the Second or Third Class possessed a sword and sword belt, it may be placed on the coffin but without other insignia (except the Cross of the Order if not displayed elsewhere). If a member of the Third of Second Class was a Papal Knight or a member of another recognized chivalric order, the sword of that order may not be placed on top of the coffin, and especially on top of the flag of the Order of Malta, but may be displayed on a cushion with the other decorations.

**7. Participation in the funeral or memorial service.**

The details of participation will depend on many factors including the size and floor plan of the church, the width of the aisles, other participants, local custom and local church requirements, and very often, the weather.

7.1 It is important that one person who will be on site for the service should coordinate the members as SMOM master-of-ceremonies. That person should coordinate with the family, pastor, celebrants, funeral director, ushers, etc. Very few of these will have had any experience with the funeral of a member of the Order. They will need, and appreciate, clear guidance. All members should gather sufficiently in advance of the

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service to allow them to vest and come together with adequate time for instruction and coordination.

7.2 Participation normally includes forming an honor guard of two rows of members at the entrance to the church or inside the vestibule, facing inward toward each other. If the main aisle is wide enough, the guard can form in the aisle. The honor guard may precede the coffin up to the front of the church, or it may allow the coffin and the family to pass between their rows, and then follow them to the front.

7.3 The honor guard members should be seated in a special reserved section in the front, often just behind the pallbearers, usually on the left side.

7.4 At the end of Mass, after the blessing of the remains at a Mass of Christian burial, the members reform the honor guard. They can either precede or follow the crucifer. They again form the guard on both sides of the aisle near the rear, or go to the end of the aisle and form the guard from there to the entrance of the church, and even outside to the hearse.

**8. Daily Prayer and Hymn of the Order.**

8.1 Just prior to the final blessing at the end of Mass, it is appropriate but not required that all members of the Order present recite together the Daily Prayer of the Order, as is customary at other religious services of the Order. This will depend on the many factors involved at the time, and should follow prudence and common sense.

8.2 If it is possible to do so, it is appropriate that the Hymn of the Order (*Ave Crux Alba*) be played by organ or other musicians. It may also be sung by the choir. This is usually done immediately after the Daily Prayer of the Order. All should be standing during the Hymn. Where it is local custom, any flags (except the American flag) being carried on staffs may be lowered during the Hymn as they are at the consecration of the Eucharist.

**9. Coordination with other groups.**

9.1 For a Professed Knight of the Order of Malta the Mass and ceremonial of the Order takes precedence. For a Knight or Dame in Obedience, the ceremonial of the Order of Malta should take precedence but that is not necessary.

9.2 If the deceased was a papal knight or a member of another recognized order of chivalry, he might leave instructions, or his family might wish, to include participation of such groups in the honor guard. The details should be worked out in advance with the representative of each group, but the Order of Malta normally takes precedence.

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9.3 If the deceased was in the Third Class but was also a papal knight, the papal knights should take precedence because it is an ecclesiastical function.

9.4 If the deceased was also a member of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre: the Order of Malta takes precedence for a Professed Knight or member in Obedience, but for members of the Third Class, it may be agreed to line up members of each of the two groups on opposite sides of the aisle, or on both sides but alternating members.

9.5 Members of other recognized orders of chivalry take appropriate precedence after Malta and the Sepulchre.

9.6 If the Knights of Columbus are participating, careful advance coordination is required. But it is important to maintain the proper precedence of the orders with regard to fraternal organizations.

9.7 Non-recognized or self-styled “orders”.

9.7.1 Formal participation by members of non-recognized or self-styled orders is not compatible with, nor permitted in, the obsequies for a member of the First Class of the Order of Malta.

9.7.2 For obsequies for members of the Second and Third Classes of the Order, if the next-of-kin of the deceased should insist on the participation of members of non-recognized or self-styled orders, including such groups as the “Order of Lazarus”, the Order of Malta may appropriately decide not to participate in church robes but merely have those who wish to attend, do so as private persons.

9.7.3 In the case of the obsequies for a member of the Second or Third Classes, if it is decided to participate, the non-recognized or self-styled “orders” must take last place. Under no circumstances may they be integrated with the recognized orders, or take any precedence. And care should be taken to avoid having members of the Order of Malta in church robes photographed in the presence of members of non-recognized or self-styled orders also wearing the robes of their organizations.

**10. Viewing or Wake.**

10.1 For guidance on the viewing or wake, consult section **1. General**, above, especially **1.5** and **1.6**.

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10.2 The coffin with the mortal remains of the member is placed in accordance with local custom and regulations. The coffin of a Professed Knight, however, may be placed on a special rug directly on the floor, or if so desired by the family may be raised on a bier for the viewing.

10.3 The chivalric, religious, military and civil decorations and honors of the deceased may be displayed at the viewing or wake, in the same way as for the Mass, as described in section 6. above. Since there is usually a priedieu in front of the coffin, the display cushions normally will be to either side of the coffin.

10.4 If the coffin is closed at the wake or viewing, the insignia of Knighthood may be displayed as in section 6.3 above.

10.5 The flags of the Order may be displayed at the wake or viewing as described in section 5. above.

10.6 If the deceased was an important member of the Order, and it is the desire of the family or executor, there may be a “standing guard of honor” at the viewing as also at the church prior to the Mass. Those in the guard of honor may wear their church robes, or service or dress uniforms of the Order. Usually it is composed of two members of the Order, standing in dignified silence one on each side of the coffin, or directly behind it. The guard is changed often, from a quarter hour up to half an hour. The guard may gather in a separate room and put on their robes or uniforms there. There should be one SMOM master of ceremonies who coordinates this and leads the guards out to replace those to be relieved of duty, and to lead them back to the vesting room.

10.7 If other legitimate orders wish to participate in the guard of honor, matters should be coordinated with them.

10.8 Except for members of a standing guard of honor, members of the Order should not wear their church robes or uniforms at the viewing or wake.

10.9 The daily prayer of the Order may be said by the members present at a viewing if that is approved by the family or the person in charge of the viewing.

**11. Interment participation.**

Members may attend interment service wearing the Order church robe or uniform.

*End*