

HISTORY OF THE ORDER **The Modern Knight of St. John**

The Order from Europe to the United States of America

There was religious intolerance in Europe during the 1800 and because of that some practicing Catholic men and women left Europe for the United States of America to enable them to serve God.

The European Immigrants who had left their homelands to the United States of America to find religious freedom formed many benevolent societies within their parishes and rectories in the Church and some of them named their said benevolent societies after the Medieval Knight which was formed during the crusade era.

The European Immigrants who had left Europe for America to get religious freedom found themselves in another unstable position, as it was the time that the American Civil War was in progress.

After the American Civil War had ended there was a need for physical and Spiritual healing and as a result, more benevolent Catholic societies were formed often with a military theme.

In 1879 the various catholic benevolent societies in America met in Baltimore, Maryland, and many of those who met agreed to merge forming the Roman Catholic Union of St. John.

The Organization took for itself a model and patron, St. John the Baptist, the Baptiser of Christ. St. John the Baptist was chosen as their patron saint as he stood for the truth and died because of that; furthermore, it was he who came to prepare the way for the Lord.

The members decided to make the newly formed organization an incorporated body and on 6th May 1886 had it registered under the special Laws of New York, as the Roman Catholic Union of the Knight of St. John which was later shortened to the Knight of St. John.

The Registered Objectives of Knight of St. John under the special Laws of New York

The objects of the said corporation are:

1. To create and foster a feeling of fraternity and fellowship among the various Commanderies within the union.
2. To improve their moral, mental, and social condition
3. To assist and support members and their families in case of want, sickness or death.
4. To promote the welfare of the Roman Catholic religion

In 1992 a resolution was passed to amend the name Knight of St. John to Knight of St. John International to reflect the reality that the Order had spread to many countries including Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Togo Trinidad and Tobago, the Republic of Panama and recently the United Kingdom.

THE ORDER IN GHANA

The Order of the Knight of St. Jon was introduced into Gold Coast now Ghana in 1933 and this by divine providence. One Anthony Quansah of Saltpond, then a shipping clerk and a Catholic, was always observed to say grace before and after meals whenever he and his co-workers had lunch on the ship that frequently docked at Takoradi port. An expatriate officer on board one of these ships was impressed when he spoke to Anthony and as soon as the sign of the cross whenever he prayed. He spoke and as soon as he was convinced that the Clerk was Catholic and hailed from a Catholic family, he discussed several topics one of which was Order of the Knights of St. John. The officer gave Anthony some papers about the Order and young Anthony lost no time in getting those documents to his father, the late Bro. Emmanuel Raphael Quansah of Saltpond.

The late Bro. Quansah got a few Zealous aspirants together and applied to the Supreme Commandery in the United States of America for permission to form a commandery in Saltpond in the Central Region of Ghana. He also approached the then archbishop of Cape Coast, the late Archbishop Thomas William Porter in 1933 for permission to introduce the Order into the country. His Grace stipulated that they were to conduct meetings with the prospective members for a period of five years while the application was being considered. At the end of the 5th year, i.e. 1937, his Grace approved the establishment of the Order in Saltpond. While exchanging correspondence with the Supreme Secretary, Bro. Quansah was informed of the presence of one Bro. Bonito, an initiated member of the Order who was at the time the Manager of a merchant firm, Messrs. G.B. Ollivant Ltd. In Cape Coast. Consequently, the Supreme took advantage of this propitious opportunity to invest in Bro. Bonito with the executive authority to arrange the initiation of the aspirants and the eventual inauguration of the first commandery of the Order at Saltpond.

By providential cadence, the Parish at Saltpond was dedicated to St. John the Baptist and it was therefore most appropriate that the first Commandery in late Worthy President E.R. Quansah of Commandery No.340 on Pentecost Sunday, May 27, 1944, with the approval of Mgr. Noser, later Bishop of Accra.

With the establishment of the Sacred Heart Commandery in Accra, the biblical mustered seed was sown and indeed, it multiplies into several folds. Next came the St. Michael Commandery No. 352, Keta to be followed by St. Paul's Commandery No.354, Sekondi, and St. Francis de Sales Commandery No. 357, Cape Coast. In no time the Order of the Knights of St. John was flourishing in ant parishes in the country with its military wing adding colour and pageantry to all festive church occasions, thus offering inducement to the young men to take more interest in religious affairs of the Church.

West Africa Grand Commandery

In 1948, Brother Emmanuel Raphael Quansah Organised the five Local Commanderies that had been established in the Gold Coast, i.e. St John the Baptist Commandery No. 346, Saltpond; Sacred Heart Commandery No. 351, Accra; St. Michael Commandery No. 354, Sekondi; and St. Francis de Sales Commandery no. 357 Cape Coast, to form the Grand Commandery in West Africa. The Commandery was chartered as the First West Grand Commandery on August 19, 1949, and was fully inaugurated shortly afterwards, with Brother Emmanuel Raphael Quansah, as its first Grand President, with the rank of Colonel, and Rev. Fr. P. Derricks as the First Spiritual Adviser.

The universality of the Roman Catholic Church coupled with cross-border trade and movements of goods and persons facilitated the rapid expansion of the Noble Order in the West African sub-region. Over a span of a short time, the Noble Order was Inaugurated one after the other in Lome, Togo, Monrovia, Liberia, Enugu, Nigeria and Freetown, Sierra Leone. The expansion and growth of the Knights of St. John in these four West African countries was not without its snowball effect. The Chapter was granted to the West Africa Grand Commandery of the Knights St. John. But this was short-lived.

In 1951, Brother Michael Selormey took over as Grand President and continued with the expansion work of the Order. New Commanderies were formed with St. Augustine Commandery No.364, Lome as the First Local Commandery to be inaugurated outside Gold Coast by Colonel Michael Selormey. The Order then moved to Monrovia, Liberia, where it's First Commandery-Sacred Heart Commandery N0. 366, was inaugurated by Col. M.K. Selormey in 1952. The Order gradually extended to Nigeria and finally to Sierra Leone.

During this time the West Africa Grand Commandery decentralized into Ghana Grand Commandery, Togo Grand Commandery, Nigeria Grand Commandery and Liberia Grand Commandery. The rate of growth of the Order in Ghana had, however, followed the rise and fall of the politico-economic condition of the country. Thank God for the achievements of having 51 Local Commanderies spread throughout the regions of the country. With this on October 6, 1995, four Grand Commanderies were Formed, three of them along the lines of Ecclesiastical provinces in Ghana- Cape Coast, Accra, Tamale, and the Fourth Sierra Leone. Nigeria's Grand Commandery has also been further decentralized into four Grand Commanderies.

All three Grand Commanderies in Ghana were inaugurated at an impressive and colourful ceremony at the University of Ghana, Legon on October 5, 1995, by General John M. Windsor, Jr. then Supreme President and supported by the Supreme Secretary, Major-General Joseph W. Hauser, Jr. The first elected Grand Order President of the Accra Grand Commandery is Brigadier-General Michel U. Tantuo, then Commander of the 12th District Commandery. The first elected Grand President of the Cape Coast Grand is Brigadier-General Frederick K Akwaboah, and the first Grand President of the Tamale Grand is Brigadier-General Baasaanah.

Ladies Auxiliary

The Ladies Auxiliary has been very active in organizing in all five countries in West Africa. The first Ladies Auxiliary was organized in Liberia followed by the St. Philomena's Auxiliary at Sekondi, then Kumasi, Keta, and Denu respectively. The ladies are a strong support of the Knights whenever they are out.

Junior Order

Running concurrently with the Knights and Ladies are the Cadets and Junior Auxiliaries. These are nursery stages of the Order where young boys and girls, as future leaders are groomed to take over from the older Knights and Ladies.

The Knight of St. John International enjoys a tremendous support and encouragement of St. John International enjoys the tremendous support and encouragement of the Archbishops and Bishops. They have been the rock behind the formation of the order in many areas and spiritual advisers providing guidance. It is hoped that members will continue to fan the spirit of brotherhood, enthusiasm, cooperation, and self-sacrifice that have always characterized this Ancient and Noble Order of the Knights of St. John International.

The Knight of St. John International as we have now had nothing to do with the Maltese Knights, but it took the Maltese cross which is very significant to the Order.

The Knight of St. John International does not have a historical link with any of the ancient and Medieval Knights, which existed in the Church and elsewhere some time ago.