

Fraternal Report of the National President and Chief Executive Officer
42nd National Convention

Our current active Lodges and Districts do an outstanding job in support of the GCU's Mission Statement. Today we have 60 active Lodges and 6 Districts continuing to serve the needs of our Byzantine Catholic parishes, their local communities and their members through financial support, a wide array of fundraising and volunteer programs, and sponsoring social and athletic events for the benefit of their members. Each issue of the GCU Magazine contains an abundance of articles and photos supporting the fact that fraternalism in the GCU is alive and well. Over the past four years the GCU funded over \$200,000 to our lodges and districts through the GCU's Matching Funds Program with over \$ 800,000 in total being donated to various causes. Your Board of Directors expanded this program in 2015 allowing for additional \$1,250 matching fund events in support of the Byzantine Catholic parish their lodge is based at, a second allocation for community fundraising events and a third as a parish outreach program for other neighboring Byzantine Catholic parishes that do not have a GCU Lodge affiliation. We have also been offering Byzantine Catholic parishes the opportunity to participate in the parish outreach program working directly with our Communications and Fraternal Department. Your Board of Directors also increased the Matching Funds amount to \$1,500 per program that went into effect January 1st of this year. In addition to our Matching Funds Program and the annual subsidy funding, our Lodges and Districts can petition the Home Office for additional funds through the Grant Program and Special Events Program to assist in defraying costs of various events.

On a National level, many programs and events are sponsored to appeal to all age groups, interests and families. Many of our popular programs include our academic and athletic scholarships, our art and photo contests, theater events, professional sporting events and our Byzantine Catholic Family Days held at various amusement parks. As our participation has been declining for our National Bowling and Golf Tournaments, we have teamed up with another fraternal benefit society, Slovak Catholic Sokols, for our bowling tournament over the last two years and will be also having a joint National Golf Tournament with them in August. We are continually researching the market and interest of our members for additional programming that may be of interest.

For now, the fraternal side of the GCU as we know it today is holding its own. However, as I reported at the 2012 Convention there lies a grave concern about the sustainability of our current model of our Lodges and Districts. Since our 2012 Convention, 2 Districts have disbanded and 7 Lodges have merged. The struggle lies in the inability to engage other members of their respective Lodges to step up to become officers. Many Lodges experience only officers attending meetings and the additional members attending are up in age. We would only be fooling ourselves if we believe that our current fraternal lodge structure will sustain itself into the future. And this concern is not only within our Society but a concern among all fraternalists. The American Fraternal Alliance is very much involved in this challenge as well and are looking at undertaking a branding initiative of their own that will assist all fraternalists to find the answer or silver bullet on how best to get more of our members involved in our fraternal efforts.

I have presented to each District since the last Convention for consideration the Regional Lodge Concept that would combine lodges together but continue to operate under the current

established Rules and Regulations for Lodges and Districts. This concept was well received and created additional thoughts and ideas on how to better restructure our current lodge system. District #6 was the first to adopt this new structure. This transition was flawless and working from my viewpoint to perfection. I congratulate each of the four Lodges for their decision to form the Greater Hazleton Area Regional Lodge. I do believe that additional lodges will opt for this structure in the very near future. We must realize that this new concept is not the solution to the current problem we are faced with in attempting to lure more members into participating in the fraternal side of our business. This concept only serves as strengthening our current lodge structure and model that has been in existence since our founding. Society has changed, interests have changed, purposes have changed and if we do not change, the GCU continuing as a fraternal benefit society is not realistic. For now, as long as our existing Lodges and Districts comply with the Rules and Regulations to maintain an active status, as long as members of our lodges continue to volunteer as an officer of their respective lodge, we will continue to support each of our Lodges and Districts as we have been.

We are in the process of developing an alternative structure in an attempt to attract more of our members into participating in the fraternal side of our business. We must realize however, that not everyone one is into philanthropy, volunteering, fundraising or participating in social events for that matter. Many are just interested in the great life premium and excellent annuity rates the GCU offers, period. On the other hand we must promote what the GCU is all about. We are not just a great life premium and excellent annuity rate, but we must continue to tell our story of what “fraternal” means – Family & Community, Main Street not Wall Street. Our Mission Statement alone tells our story but we must educate our current members, prospective members and agents about who we really are. We must build a better data base, knowing what our members’ interests are, are they volunteers, what is their “personal mission,” or maybe they don’t have one which is fine.

We must also come to realize that new members coming into our Society may be intimidated and have no interest to attend a Lodge meeting, with most meetings conducted in a Byzantine Catholic Church Hall or Social Center. Because of this obstacle, we are also in the process of researching the prospects of developing “State Lodges”. Studies by the American Fraternal Alliance and our own experience reveals that the label “Lodge,” is misconstrued by many, liking fraternal as a *“secret, close knit private club - secret hand shake and all”* such as “The Loyal Order of Water Buffalos” of which Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble were members of or “The International Order of the Friendly Sons of Raccoons” that Ralph Kramden and Ed Norton of the Honeymooners were members of.

For example, we may want to consider our state lodge for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania take on the label of being the “Keystone State Convocation” or the state of New Jersey being named the Garden State Convocation, noting that the U.S. Coast Guard refers to a group of eagles as a “convocation.” Per Paragraph 2 of the GCU Bylaws, the emblem of the GCU is an eagle in flight holding the American flag in the talons of its right claw and a 3-bar cross in its left claw. Just an idea for consideration.

A “Cause of the Quarter” can be promoted for our stat convocation members to participate in whether it’s volunteering to existing causes, participating in a habitat for humanity build, running

in a 5 K race or whatever organization the GCU opts to participate with as a cosponsor. State Convocation members would also have the capability of making a donation to the “Cause of the Quarter” as well.

Our state convocations would operate strictly via the internet in its entirety, the promotion of the various events, all reporting requirements, making donations, holding meetings and many other aspects of operating a state convocation all being handled in an electronic format. Social media would also play a most important part in this new structure. This new structure would target the X, Y and millennial generations to participate in the fraternal side of our business as we need to make this new structure “cool” and “attractive” to the younger members of our society that will get them involved fraternally as their initial introduction to the GCU. Additional financial business will no doubt follow. This structure is still in the developmental stage with much more research and discussion.

This issue as I stated is also a challenge for all fraternalists as well. One Society that has been successful in their efforts to have more of their members involved is Thrivent Financial, one of the largest fraternalists in the United States in terms of assets and membership. They have been most cordial in sharing many of their newest programs and successes. We also have some ideas of our own that we will be sharing with you today at our luncheon about our challenges and the new GCU Go Give Program. We must realize that we have transformed to “taking care of others” in addition to “taking care of our own”!

We will also be researching the prospects of developing GCU Community, creating relationships with various venues for discounted pricing for sporting events, theater events, cultural and art venues and other opportunities to offer discount pricing to our members as an added benefit of GCU membership

I personally am very excited about many of our new ideas and am confident that we will attract more of our members to participate in our fraternal programs through these new programs.

I have spoken about this concern numerous times in the past, and now, that we are in the strongest position financially in the history of the GCU, we must take action to revitalize and make known, that the GCU is a fraternal benefit society, because being fraternal was a most important part of our “Past” and must be a most important part of our “Future” because:

We are the GC – YOU!
“Investing in the Goodness of Community”

Thank you!