The following text is an edited transcription from the original recording.

Reverend Clergy, Grand Commander, Grand Priors and Distinguished Members. I am going to follow in the tradition of Rear Admiral Carey in which he chose to provide an overview of the last six months as seen by the Grand Master. I will divide that overview into three parts:

PART ONE

One of the most important things that happened in the past year – and it was negative – and could have been terminal for the Order, was the regrettable situation that developed in Norway in which you had a catastrophe. And you had a worldwide reaction.

That could have killed the Order.

I must tell you that the immediate reaction from Clergy throughout our part of the world – not to mention members – was one of horror.

How do explain yourself?

The Grand Commander took the opportunity to make it a strength and not a weakness. The Grand Prior of Norway, in great emotion, took the opportunity to make it a strength and not a weakness.

I must tell you that one of the most important members of this order, one we seldom see but talk to almost weekly, Bishop Younan, reached out and contacted senior members of the Norwegian government, the Norwegian Lutheran Church, and religious leaders throughout the world regarding this sad issue. His message was clear to all of his distinguished leaders. “I am the Chaplain General of the Knights Templar, and what you see going on in Norway has nothing to do with our Order.” That personal message was sent throughout the world and was most important. That response by the Chaplain General and the equally speedy response by Her Highness Princess Elisabeth, Royal Patron, to key leaders within the EU and UK, also contributed to reducing the misunderstanding that our Order was involved in this tragedy.

As helpful as the position of our Grand Chaplain and Royal Patron was in mitigating this tragic series of events, it was the quick action of our Grand Commander Bob Disney with the able assistance of the Webmaster General and the Secretary General that turned this crisis for our Order into something closer to success. Following some intense discussions, it was agreed to put out a worldwide, multinational key press statement which was printed or used in radio and television announcements throughout the world. It was a common statement for our Grand Prior’s to use as they chose, and without exception, it received favorable comments. Ours was the action of a mature organization and I am proud to report to you that is exactly the way it was received by the media, international governments, and our membership. That is the first item of my report. You all saw it unfold. We all lived through it, now I would like to move to the second key item.
PART TWO

In this section, I should like to comment on the financing of the international meetings and select international officers. It goes without saying that we have a modest income and any effort to commit our limited resources should be held to the highest standards. Nevertheless, I would like to ask that you consider two areas in which, in my view, we must consider increased funding. First, from time to time, it is very appropriate that the Chaplain General, Bishop Younan, be with us. In the past, when he has attended our meetings with his wife, it was funded through individual donations of members of the Order or through detailed prior planning by the Host Grand Priory. In this later case, the projects costs of His Grace, both transportation and lodging, were known before hand and divided into the registration costs. That can happen in the future and I would suggest that both the costs of the Chaplain General and the Royal Patron be included in the reservation expenses for all those attending that particular meeting. Until our Order has other sources of revenue, we will find that only a modest increase in registration expenses per person will allow for such hosting. I would add that if Bishop Younan is able to attend, it is appropriate for the hosting Grand Priory to reach out to senior clergy in the host city and arrange meetings.

The other expenses I would like to address is the annual stipend for the Grand Commandry. I think we honestly need to increase that stipend by at least $2,000 per year. As the immediate past Grand Commander, I can tell you that $2,000, a modest increase, will only allow the Grand Commander enough additional funds to help in attending the two required annual international meetings. This suggestion to the GMC I believe can be undertaken at this time.

I haven’t been asked to say this, but I told the Grand Commander some weeks ago that I was going to, mainly because that hasn’t been changed since around 2002. And if it wasn’t for GP USA, I think most of you know this, OSMTH puts up $2,000 every year. GP USA has every year matched that with another $2,000 from their Grand Prior for the International Grand Commander.

PART THREE – THE THREE LEGS

Our Members - the Knights and Dames - are the centre, we draw from them everything we do on the world stage; both in the Clergy and International Organizations.

Membership in International Organizations

Our Senior Clergy

That is how we operate. It works perfectly. But we need to come back here so much. Through the three legs of the Order we carry out our Mission as bridge-builders as a charitable (Grand Priory/Prior level and advocacy (OSMTH-I/international level) among Christians at risk and all peoples of the world. I want to single out Germany and Greece, both of which continue to provide people to these two locations. Every time we ask, they do it. And I ask a lot.

This year at the United Nations, the wonderful event that Marcel said was outstanding was not in Geneva, but was augmented by a Sustained Environmental Conference, which was held in
Bonn, Germany. The NGO UN kick off is normally held in New York, but when the UN Headquarters is being remodeled the first meeting is being hosted around the world. This year Bonn was the kick-off conference for the NGOs. There’s always a conference and this is where they want young people. Germany not only welcomed them, they hosted it. The Grand Commander appointed the Grand Prior of Germany as Head-of-Delegation. That doesn’t happen often and she accepted, even though she was due to go into surgery. And she communicated with the Delegates.

Greece sent an outstanding Professor of Economics (currently teaching at Oxford). That delegation was extraordinary. The two professors that joined the Delegation from Germany were wonderful. Many of you have seen the picture, they’re all young. I can tell you that the delegation made a hit. The young Duke of Mecklenburg was part of the Delegation. At the same time, the American that went was herself in the Institute of European Studies, funded 100% by the EU, at the University of Illinois. There are three sites in the United States that has an EU Centre for Scholarship, and the campus at Champaign has one. If you have students from Germany, or the US, or South American who want to become specialists in the European Union, the money is there, the housing is there. She’s from that. We have now formed an informal OSMTH bond with that institute. Who knows, we may even gain another Knight from it. That is literally how we function. Perhaps we should even consider formalizing it. That’s how it works.

Let us move on to the Clergy and then wind up.

Many years ago, and continued this year by Bob Disney, I was asked to begin working with religious leaders throughout the world.

I won’t take the time this morning to relate how those relationships were structured, other than to say at the encouragement of the Roman Catholic Church among others, with formal meetings with them over series of years, along with the advice of the Grand Prior to Italy, the Roman Church said that “We’d be happy to work with you, just don’t ask us to do it as a recognized Christian Order because at this time our mutual history complicates such an action. Do it as Christians, but do it on the diplomatic side.” So, that is what we have done. That’s taken off the stage any friction that might exist. They have been the ones that suggested, and some of you including Bob Disney, were in the room with me when we met with the Apostolic Delegate (Papal Nuncio) from the Holy See to the Holy Land itself and the United States. Archbishop Sambi said to us years ago, “Take an Orthodox Church” and then he went one step further by saying “Please come to the Holy Land”, and “Consider the Armenian Patriarch.”

(Grand Commander Disney echoed this point stating that there were four people in the room; the Archbishop, the Grand Master, the then Grand Commander, and GPUSA, and those are exactly the words of the Archbishop).

And why did he say that? Because it is the oldest national Christian Church in the World. You can’t hurt yourself with that. So, we’ve proceeded on that basis, with the approval of Princess Elizabeth, and the Religious Protector Metropolitan Theodosius that’s the way it should happen.

When we go to meet international religious leaders we do a few things.

First, we inform the leader who we are. A cold call: “Hello, I’m Pat Rea, I’m from OSMTH”. They never asked me to explain who OSMTH, the Knight Templar are. The first thing is information. The second is to discuss cooperation. The third is formal relations.
I’m going to “x” the box on the four meetings we had with Patriarchs this year.

The first one we had earlier this year was with the Ecumenical Patriarch. This meeting was extremely, extremely important! One would have to say he is at least equal to any of the leaders within the Christian world and most certainly in the Orthodox Church.

The Ecumenical Patriarch welcomed us warmly because the Grand Prior of Greece and his staff had done wonderful work prior to our arrival. He welcomed us, and kept us there from mid-morning until mid-afternoon. Other delegations came and went, but we stayed.

With regard to cooperation, absolutely, and he specifically asked us to change our objectives, which Bob did in the last thing you voted on. We were saying “Christians at risk; bridge-builders, that is what they liked: Ecumenical bridge-builders. But he said “not just for the Sons of Abraham, and not just for religious, but for all peoples of the world.”

Formal Recognition. This did not happen, but, he will welcome us and work with OSTMH-I.

What he meant was this. He said “you come, you ask your Brothers and Sisters to come to the Phanar”, which is the Orthodox equal to the Vatican. “His All Holiness said, I will receive them.” And he will personally give you the special Medal which was struck by Greece in his name. He will present you with an apostolic blessing on the spot. He said “For me, I recognize you. For my Church, I can’t give you my blessing. But I can cooperate, I can do whatever you want, I will be with you, I will speak to you, and I will be proud to.”

Two weeks ago, Paul (Tsolakian) reached out to the Armenian Patriarchs – both the Orthodox and the Catholic. Here’s what came out of the Lebanese effort. On the way to Lebanon, two other things occurred. Tony Piscitelli, who is sitting back here, had been badgering us for two years because the Lebanese Military wanted to have a Priory in Lebanon. At the time as Grand Commander, I said “hang on, not yet.” That might look like we were taking sides. So we waited. We had meetings with senior Government leaders of Lebanon, were welcomed, and hosted and had luncheon. Corporate leaders of Lebanon also came to some of those events. Tony orchestrated it. Bishop Younan sent a personal message to the Patriarch of the Maronites which is the largest Christian denomination in Lebanon, saying please meet with Pat Rea. My plane was late, the Patriarch himself had to leave the country, but he met with Tony and it was a wonderful meeting.

Let me say that the Maronites not only did they welcome Tony, they also said we will cooperate. Then we met with the Head of the Armenian Church outside Armenia His Holiness Patriarch & Catholics Aram I and it was a great meeting. This is one of the most impressive human beings that I’ve met in my life. He is the immediate past President of the World Council of Churches. This man is only 61. He holds the title of Patriarch and Catholicos. That means he is much like the “Head of State” just like the Pope, in his area.

We were welcomed? WE remained as his guests for 4.5 hours at a church site in his Holy See in Silesia….which if you go back, this is one of the Christian countries form the Holy Land. It was Armenian. He welcomed us in his throne room. He said “I know who you are, I know what you stand for. I, as one of the Patriarchs of one of the Great Historic Churches, welcome you because you are Ecumenical, and you do good things.” Where did he learn it? Our website (www.osmth.org).

Cooperation: all over the place – three things immediately.
First, he wanted to have a North American connection with his seminary. Why North America? Because they (North America) funded the current Seminary after the Great Pogrom in Turkey, which resulted in the loss of a million and a half Armenians by the Turks. They funded the Seminary in Lebanon.

The second thing, along with the other Christians, they needed assistance with the education of their Grade Schools and High Schools. It seemed the Bishops are teachers - the Bishops are the senior teachers and professors for their people - not that they have any option.

Now let me explain to you about cooperation. This is major. I was told about the Archives of the Armenian Church (I was pre-briefed to ask that question). The Armenian Church is old. Theirs are countries in the Christian areas that had a Templar activity and Templar Castles. Only the Armenian Patriarch remained with Saladin when all the other Christian Heads fled. Their records are unbelievable. The question I was asked to ask him, “Your Holiness, may we see your history of the Templars. You have it all.” His response, “Yes, I’m in my third of fourth century. My staff are translating them into all languages of the World.” He said, “As we hit them, you are admitted to my Archives; you can have all the copies. By the way, we may have information that no one else has.” They will possible have more information on this Order that exists in any place in the world, including the Vatican.

I even received a message from the Archbishop of his Church one day after I returned hone and he sent the message to me as Grand Master and what he said was “Our Patriarch has given his blessing on all accounts to you. Let’s work together….but more than that, and that’s very important. I want you to go to Geneva and meet with the World Council of Churches, and use my name. You should be cooperating, formally, with all the Churches of the world.” The World Council does not have the (Roman) Catholic Church in it, but the Roman Catholic Church does have Official Observers sitting on all Committees. A tremendous invitation!

The last one is the Armenian Roman Catholic Catholicos His Beatitude Nerses Bedros XIX. He too had read the Website. Cooperation? Completely. On behalf of his Church, he said this, even after I explained the guidance that was given by GP Italy - “Okay, but let me say, you must go to Rome. I will call. You must meet with the Secretary of State. At that level, you are doing to much in the World today, you deserve to be there.” The he gave his blessings, the second Roman Catholic hierarch to extend that honor. He was very straightforward. Each time, by the way, if you go with me, you’ll hear that I always apologize for the excesses of the Crusades. He responded, “no, no, that’s history.”

So, this is the report, I can tell you that they all said “go to the World Council of Churches.” The Ecumenical Patriarch said “go see the Archbishop of Canterbury,” and that’s been arranged. England and Wales has offered their help. Bishop Younan has said that “I will set that up”. We will shortly have seen them all. When we go to Rome, and we will, with GP Italy, we will see the Secretariat, which is the definition of what he said we should do - us and Stelio.

And when we talk push-pull this is “pull”. Most of those meetings I did not set up although we had outstanding support from GP Greece. Everybody did it for us. In fact, all of them were done for us. Always more people were calling to reach us while we were traveling. We were getting phone calls from all over the country…. from government and from the Church who wanted us to come here. We couldn’t do it.

So Grand Commander, that’s the report.