

State of the Order Committee Final Report

The State of the Order Committee is pleased to provide this report to the 52nd National Convention delegates and High Court in preparation for the convention meetings in August. The committee held four meetings to review pertinent issues facing the Catholic Order of Foresters to further its growth and development. We received reports from the High Court, and members of the committee from jurisdictions across the country were able to provide good perspective. I would like to thank the members of the committee for their diligence and service to the committee:

- Barbara Bohney (IN)
- Jessica Bries (IA)
- Greg Cass, Jr. (WI)
- Joseph Meyers (IL)

We would like to thank High Chief Ranger, Rod Oligmueller for his contributions to the committee's discussion on behalf of the High Court. Additionally, thanks to Mark Walsworth, Executive Vice President, who served as Home Office Liaison.

The Preliminary Report was posted on the COF National Convention Website Page and all members and Delegates were provided with a two (2) week comment period. After the posting of the Preliminary Report, the Committee received numerous comments. Some were praising the work of the Committee, and our Committee members truly appreciate and thank all of those who applauded the work. The Committee also received many questions, requests for revisions and corrections of typos, grammar, punctuation, and numbering. All comments were reviewed and each comment was addressed. Every individual who submitted a comment received the Committee's response and all comments and the Committees responses have been posted on the Catholic Order of Foresters National Convention Website.

Included in this report are four issues discussed by the committee, pertinent discussion, and the committee's recommendation (if any) to proceed and corresponding resolution (if applicable).

Respectfully Submitted,

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Gregory J. Buehner
Chairperson, State of the Order Committee



Issue 1: Transition from a convention of delegates model to a direct election model to address ongoing governance issues

<p>Background</p>	<p>The High Court presented the concept of the direct election model to each of the jurisdictional conventions in spring 2024 and received feedback and general endorsement. The High Court reported to the State of the Order Committee that a resolution had been approved (by the High Court) in May 2024 to move to a direct election model and asked the State of the Order to provide further consideration</p>
<p>Discussion</p>	<p>The committee discussed the reports from the High Court and jurisdictional conventions. There was active discussion regarding the challenges facing fraternal in general with membership engagement. Most pertinent to the Catholic Order of Foresters was the loss of local courts and lower delegate numbers participating in the jurisdictional process. A direct election model would (potentially) encourage broader participation nationally. The key factor for the committee is doing what’s best for the Catholic Order of Foresters, our organization. From a governance perspective, the direct election model will serve the Catholic Order of Foresters in years to come.</p>
<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>The committee unanimously endorsed the resolution below and refers the resolution to the Bylaws/Constitution Committee for proper preparation should the resolution be adopted by Convention.</p> <p>The committee recommends the adoption of the following resolution:</p> <p>WHEREAS, Catholic Order of Foresters (“COF”) is an Illinois domestic fraternal benefit society that is governed by the Illinois Fraternal Benefit Society Insurance Laws (“Illinois Law”) and the Internal Revenue Code (“IRC”);</p> <p>WHEREAS, Illinois Law requires fraternal benefit societies to have a representative form of government;</p> <p>WHEREAS, Illinois Law provides two (2) methods of fulfilling the requirement of having a representative form of government (1) by holding a Convention at least every four (4) years (“Convention Method”) or (2) by having all members cast a direct vote to elect its Board of Directors (“Direct Election Method”);</p> <p>WHEREAS, COF uses the Convention Method to elect its Board of Trustees;</p> <p>WHEREAS, Illinois Law requires that fraternal benefit societies operate on a lodge system;</p> <p>WHEREAS, COF’s lodges are called Local Courts and Jurisdiction Courts;</p> <p>WHEREAS, COF has experienced a sustained decline in the participation of Local Court and Jurisdiction Court member meetings;</p>

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WHEREAS, many Local Court Officers and Jurisdiction Courts are experiencing difficulties in finding replacement officers;

WHEREAS, during the 2024 National Quadrennial Convention cycle, Local Courts only filled sixty-two (62%) percent of the permitted delegate positions;

WHEREAS, the required National Quadrennial Convention has also experienced a decline in participation of members;

WHEREAS, other fraternal benefit societies have experienced similar challenges;

WHEREAS, as a result of these challenges, many fraternal benefits societies have transitioned from the Convention Method to the Direct Election Method to ensure that all members have the opportunity to participate in the representative form of government;

WHEREAS, due to the declining number of Local Courts and Jurisdiction Courts, many members have no opportunity to participate in the representative form of government;

WHEREAS, the High Court being cognizant of the issues directed the home office to prepare a presentation to be given at all of the Jurisdiction Conventions;

WHEREAS, at many of the Jurisdiction Conventions, the delegates recognized the current challenges and concerns of fulfilling the legal requirements for fraternal benefit societies;

WHEREAS, based on the feedback from the Jurisdiction Conventions, the High Court unanimously adopted a resolution directing the officers of COF to work with appropriate National Convention Committees to effectuate a plan consistent with the intent to change from the Convention Model to a Direct Election Model;

WHEREAS, the State of the Order National Convention Committee has considered all of the relevant factors and believes it is in the best interests of COF to transition from a Convention Method to a Direct Election Method.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED; that the State of the Order Committee recommends that the Convention approve a revision to the method of electing the High Court from a Convention Method to Direct Election Method.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Constitution Committee of the National Convention develop the Necessary Articles of Incorporation and Constitution & Bylaws changes to effectuate the conversion of COF from the Convention Method to the Direct Election Method.



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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the State of the Order Committee compels all of the membership of COF to have a renewed focus on membership engagement with revitalized spiritual, charitable, and social activity.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the High Court develop a plan to address the declining participation in fraternal programs to promote new engagement.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the High Court develop new regional and/or national membership gatherings to promote engagement by providing platforms that allow for networking, social interaction, charitable outreach initiatives, and education.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the High Court Officers, Trustees, COF Officers, and employees take any and all actions necessary to effectuate the above and foregoing resolutions.

Issue 2: Importance of Fraternal Gatherings to the Catholic Order of Foresters

Background	With the direct election model, contemplated in Issue 1, consideration must be given to the future fraternal gathering and programmatic models that will benefit the Order.
Discussion	HCR Oligmueller reported to the committee that the High Court has a strong desire to maintain regional and national gatherings to promote the Order, educate the membership on current pertinent issues and provide for the social component of membership. The committee’s discussion in this area was consistent with HCR Oligmueller’s charge; however, much time and careful consideration must be given to the implementation and the program itself. The committee discussed referring this matter to the High Court so that following convention, it can direct the Home Office and membership efforts appropriately.
Recommendation	<p>The committee unanimously endorsed the resolution below and refers the resolution to High Court and Convention.</p> <p>The committee recommends the adoption of the following resolution:</p> <p>WHEREAS, Catholic Order of Foresters (“COF”) is an Illinois domestic fraternal benefit society;</p> <p>WHEREAS, fraternal benefit societies are organizations of individuals who share a common ethnic, religious or vocation affiliation and together aid and assist one another and promote a common cause;</p> <p>WHEREAS, fraternal benefit societies must have a fraternal purpose and activities;</p>

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WHEREAS, the traditional COF fraternal activities have experienced a decline in participation;

WHEREAS, new members of COF avoid participating in COF traditional fraternal activities;

WHEREAS, the State of the Order Committee of the Catholic Order of Foresters 52nd Quadrennial Convention believes it is essential that the High Court/Board of Directors develop a regional fraternal gathering that will engage new and young COF members;

WHEREAS, the State of the Order Committee of the Catholic Order of Foresters 52nd Quadrennial Convention recommended that the substitution of the direct election method in place of the Convention method for electing the High Chief Ranger/Chair of the Board and the High Court Trustees/Board of Director Members; and

WHEREAS, the State of the Order Committee of the Catholic Order of Foresters recommends the Delegates to the 52nd National Quadrennial Convention adopt the above and forgoing resolutions.

NOW THEREFOR BE IT RESOLVED, the High Court develop a survey requesting input from all COF members as to the fraternal events and gatherings members would support.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that upon completion of the survey, the High Court after considering the results of the survey, develop regional fraternal gatherings.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the High Chief Ranger, High Court Trustees, Officers, and employees take any and all actions necessary to effectuate the above and foregoing resolutions.

Issue 3: Review and Possible Expansion of the Limited Membership classification

Background The committee discussed the Limited Membership classification (currently in place) and whether there were opportunities to grow the Order's membership and support local courts and agents' efforts for that growth without compromising the values and identity that have made the Catholic Order of Foresters strong for 141 years.

Discussion A key factor for the committee in this review was the preservation of our Catholic identity. The consensus of the committee was to support the Home Office, agents and membership across the country, creating opportunities to serve those who support Catholic values through expansion of Limited Membership in a way that does not dilute the Catholic identity and values of the Order. Committee members voiced interest in support for evangelization and bringing membership back to the Catholic Faith.



Issue 3: Review and Possible Expansion of the Limited Membership classification

Recommendation	The committee does not recommend any changes to Limited Membership currently. Should the High Court consider expansion of the Limited Membership classification in the future, it should be done so in a way to protect the Order’s Catholic identity and values.
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Issue 4: Review of the current policy programs to attract youth members/younger members into the organization

Background	The committee discussed the ongoing desire of local courts to offer membership to youth (children, grandchildren, etc.).
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Discussion	While there remains a desire among the membership to provide for opportunities for youth members to join at a smaller policy entry point, the costs of providing the smaller policies remain a challenge. The committee discussed the former “Pathways” program and a desire to identify the “next generation” of Forester members. A key point made by a committee member was that membership should be a “prioritization” and that the costs should be considered to make it a priority for the member while at the same time, being an affordable plan for the Catholic Order of Foresters as an organization. There remains an interest in generating a pipeline of future members for the Order in some way.
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Recommendation	The committee does not have any specific recommendation on this issue. The committee would like to challenge the High Court to regularly review product offerings in a manner which supports affordable options in the market. This will allow opportunities to grow the membership in a prudent manner, recognizing this is an important consideration for many Courts.
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