

PACKET FOR A NEW MEMBER OF THE ORDER OF THE LAUREL

You've been asked to join the Order of the Laurel (or you were "surprised" and are already a member). What does it all mean? What does being a peer mean? What rights do you have that you didn't have before? What responsibilities?

This handout is designed to help answer these questions.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES - Being a member of an order of Peerage means that people are supposed to look up to you as an example of what the SCA is all about: chivalry, honor, courtesy, and the furtherance of your art. Here is what the SCA Organizational Handbook (Corpora, page 33, section VII.A. Personal Awards and Titles, Patents of Arms) has to say about members of the Orders of Peerage:


1. "General Requirements: Candidates for any order conferring a Patent of Arms must meet the following minimum criteria. Additional requirements may be set by law and custom of the kingdoms as deemed appropriate and necessary by the Crown.
 - a. They shall have been obedient to the governing documents of the Society and the laws of the kingdom.
 - b. They shall have consistently shown respect for the Crown of the kingdom.
 - c. They shall have set an example of courteous and noble behavior suitable to a peer of the realm.
 - d. They shall have demonstrated support for the aims and ideals of the Society by being authentic in dress, equipment and behavior as is within their power.
 - e. They shall have shared their knowledge and skills with others.
 - f. They shall have practiced hospitality according to their means and as appropriate to the circumstances.
 - g. They shall have made every effort to learn and practice those skills desirable at and worthy of a civilized court. To this end they should have some knowledge of a wide range of period forms, including but not limited to literature, dancing, music, heraldry, and chess, and they should have some familiarity with combat as practiced in the Society. They should also participate in Society re-creations of several aspects of the culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance."

That's what Corpora says about you BEFORE you are asked to become a peer. Let's take a look at the duties they expect once you BECOME one. The following is from the Organizational Handbook, Corpora, VII.A.4.a.2.b.:

- b. "The Order of the Laurel. Members of the Order of the Laurel may choose to swear fealty, but are not required to do so.
 - 1) Specific requirements:
 - a) The candidate must have attained the standard of excellence in skill and/or knowledge equal to that of his or her prospective peers in some area of the Arts or Sciences.
 - b) The candidate must have applied this skill and/or knowledge for the instruction of members and service to the kingdom to an extent above and beyond that normally expected of members of the Society.
 - 2) The duties of the members of the order include:
 - a) To set an example of courtesy and chivalrous conduct.
 - b) To respect the Crown of the kingdom; to support and uphold the laws of the kingdom and the governing documents of the Society.
 - c) (If the member has sworn fealty to the Crown) To support and uphold the Crown of his or her kingdom.
 - d) To enrich the kingdom by sharing his or her knowledge and skills.

- e) To advise the Crown on the advancement of candidates for the Laurel.”

Now, let's take a look at what the West Kingdom Laurel Ceremony has to say:

 **King:** **Will you now give Us your word that you will henceforth comport yourself as befits a Peer of Our Realm, as you most surely have until now, and that you will attempt in all your endeavors to be a noble example to Our people?**

Candidate: I will. *(or equivalent speech)*

 **Queen:** **Will you promise further to treat all with Courtesy, and to uphold the Laws and traditions of Our Kingdom?**

Candidate: I will. *(or equivalent speech)*

These are the words that pertain to your future duties and responsibilities as a peer. Now that you understand them, and have agreed to them, let us move on to your rights and privileges as a new peer.

WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS? - First, you have a change in status in the SCA. You are now (or will soon be) a member of the PEERAGE. One definition of a PEER goes like this:

peer \pi(e)r\ n. [ME, fr. OF per, fr. per, adj., equal. fr. **1**: one that is of equal standing with another: EQUAL **2** *archaic*: COMPANION **3 a**: a member of one of the five ranks (as duke, marquess, earl, viscount, or baron) of the British peerage. **b**: NOBLE. (This is from “Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary”)

Second, your actual rights and privileges are:

- ❖ You have the right to wear a medallion or pendant displaying a laurel wreath. This is the symbol of the order.
- ❖ You have the right to swear fealty to the Crown and Kingdom of the West, and receive fealty FROM the Crowns of the West.
- ❖ You have the right to wear a chain of large open links (a “fealty chain”) or a collar of medallions emblematic of the Order of the Laurel (and are encouraged to) if you swear fealty to the Crowns of the West to show your fealty to the Crown,
- ❖ You have the right to wear a Laurel Cloak (prominent display of the Laurel Wreath on the back of a cloak).
- ❖ You have the right to the title of Master or Mistress (or Dame if you wish).
- ❖ You have the right to a free name change with the College of Heraldry (however, this does not give you the right to a name that is not ‘legal’ -- it still must follow the rules, but you do not have to pay the ‘change of name’ fee normally required -- this is a West Kingdom policy only).

It doesn't sound like all that much when you sit down and read it, does it? However, think of the honor being given you. Think of the members of the Order. They wish to make you one of their own, a COMPANION (see the dictionary definition above). Elevation to the peerage is an honor, and it is being presented to you by the Crowns of the West and the current members of the Order.

THE LAUREL CEREMONY - What are your options when it comes to the ceremony? The first thing to understand is that while you are joining the Order of Laurel, you are not marrying the Order. This means that while there are certain options available to you, you are not allowed to completely rewrite the ceremony. (If you have questions, *please* talk to the heralds ...)

OPTIONS:

- a) You have the right to a vigil. (*A vigil!? for a Laurel? Yes*) It gives you a chance to talk over concepts of peerage, fealty, comportment of a peer, etc., with other members of the Laurel and other peers of the kingdom. Fealty is an important issue that NEEDS discussion (although a vigil is not required to discuss it). A vigil is “the all-night watch sometimes kept by the candidate for knighthood, kneeling before the altar where his arms are laid, as a sign that they are to be devoted to Christian service.” (The Dictionary of Chivalry, Grant Uden) The SCA version of the vigil is an opportunity for a new peer to discuss such important topics as fealty, service, obligations of peerage, etc. The form of the vigil is determined by the nature of the event. During outdoor events, they are generally situated in a pavilion that has been erected enough of a distance from the rest of the encampment that privacy can be assured. At indoor events (such as 12th Night), space is more at a premium.

While many vigils are confined to the members of the Order you are about to join, there has been a trend recently to open vigils to all of the Peerage Orders within the Kingdom. What kind of vigil, should you decide to have one, should be something you consider.

- b) You may have a processional into court. This may include members of your household; it may include a banner bearer; it may include people holding examples of your artwork (this is HIGHLY encouraged). (If you do this, make it flashy!) You may do either b or c, not both.


OR

- c) You may, if you wish, have a couple members of the Order escort you into Court, rather than the spokesman/person simply announcing your name.
- d) You may have a spokesman/spokes-person talk for you during the ceremony, explaining what you have done to bring you to the notice of the members of the Order.
- e) You have the option to swear fealty. (See discussion on fealty to follow.) If you choose to swear fealty, you may swear fealty on the Great Sword of State of the Kingdom, or you may do this by taking the hands of the Royalty.
- f) You may have a member of the Order present you with a personal fealty chain or laurel medallion. If they do so, they may wish to announce the medallion/chain’s history. If they wish to do this, consider how it may sound. If the medallion or chain actually has a history, it can sound pretty neat. If the history is “I have been wearing this chain for a year, and now it’s yours”, it sounds a bit silly.
- g) Your spouse or significant other may be present to assist the Queen in placing the medallion around your neck.
- h) Your friends may wish to present you with a “tool of the trade”. A knight is often given a sword by the person he was squired to, as an example. This gift would be from your friends and paid for by them, but would be presented by the Crown.

NOTE: If you would like a copy of the ceremony, please contact the Heralds.

FEALTY -- This is one of the most controversial topics involved with Peerage. Most peers in the Kingdom of the West opt to swear fealty. However, you should consider it carefully. Fealty should never be taken lightly. Swearing fealty means that you are making a commitment to the Crowns of the West, and that they are making a return commitment to you. Below is the fealty oath used by the Kingdom of the West, when investing a new member to the Order of the Laurel -- read it carefully. If you have any questions, discuss it with members of the Order.:

Herald: To your Liege and before your peers, repeat after me:
Here do I swear
by mouth and hand
fealty and service
to the Crown and Kingdom of the West
to speak and to be silent
to come and to go / to strike and to spare
to do and to let be
in such matters as concern the Kingdom
on my honor
and the lawful commands of the Crown
in need or in plenty
in peace or in war
in living or in dying
from this hour henceforth
until the King depart from His Throne
or death take me
or the world end
so say I _____.

 **King:** **And this do We hear,
nor fail to remember,
and We for Our part do swear fealty to you,
_____,
to protect and defend you
and all your household,
with all Our power,
until We depart from Our Throne,
or death take Us,
or the world end.
So say We, _____, King of the West.**

 **Queen:** **So also say We, _____, Queen of the West."**

The general consensus (although there are those that would debate this) is that once you have sworn fealty to the Crowns of the West, you are constantly in fealty. This means that the oaths of fealty presented during a Coronation ceremony are simply a re-affirmation of your fealty. Consider the concept as swearing fealty "to the Crown and Kingdom of the West", rather than swearing fealty to an individual King and Queen. This is just ONE way of looking at it. The West Kingdom Herald's Handbook has an article that discusses the concepts of fealty, which may help you come to a decision.

CEREMONY CHECKLIST - NEW MEMBER OF THE ORDER OF THE LAUREL

Name of Candidate: _____

- You may, if you wish, have a couple of members of the Order escort you into Court.

If you opt for this, who will be the attendants who do the “seek?” _____ and _____

OR

- You may have a processional into court. See the section of the New Member packet discussing the ceremony. You may do either the Escort OR the Processional option.

- You may have a spokesman/spokes-person speak for you during the ceremony, explaining what you have done to bring you to the notice of the members of the Order.

If you opt to do this, who will be your spokes-person? _____ (*make sure you discuss it with them!*)

- You have the option to swear fealty. (Multiple choice below ... choose one if you opt to swear fealty:)

- You may do this on the Great Sword of State of the Kingdom.
- You may do this by taking the hands of the Royalty.

- A member of the Order may wish to present you with their personal medallion and/or chain. If you know who in advance, please let us know: _____

- Your spouse/significant other may be present to assist the Queen in placing the medallion around your neck.

- If you choose this option, you should PROBABLY do the processional, so that he or she is nearby and ready to come forward (or be brought forward) at the appropriate time. Who is your significant other (so that the heralds can be prepared to prompt the people involved)?

- Your friends may wish to present a “tool of the trade”. If so, please have them notify the heralds so that staging can be arranged (so the ceremony does not look awkward). _____

When finished completing this list, please remove from your New Member Packet, and return to the Banner Herald, or the Vesper Principal Herald. (See the back of [The Page](#) for where to call or mail this to, or visit the Heralds’ website and look at the Contacts page, if you do not see them at an event.)

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