Report to Board of Directors Regarding Challenges during 2021 GCC
8/24/2021

While the virtual Grand Chapter Congress was an overall success, there were certainly areas that could have been better based in part on lessons learned through this experience. Many of these challenges we were able to adapt and correct throughout the event, others were out of our control or are simply lessons learned should we ever have to do a similar event in the future.

To start, I want to provide some context on how we decided upon the technology solution of combining Zoom and the Meridia Voting Software.

At the end of 2020, as we approached the virtual 2021 Provincial Council Meetings, we knew that whatever system we would use for Provincials would be a test run for the then not yet confirmed virtual GCC. When discussing successes and challenges with other organizations who had been forced already to hold virtual legislative sessions, the most common challenge shared was the time and frustration around credentialing delegates. Organizations with simpler delegate eligibility policies than ours, and fewer delegates, had stories of spending hours credentialing delegates for each day's sessions. Thus the credentialing process became a priority as we considered different software solutions.

It is absolutely true that the best interfaces for being recognized and voting often do not align with the best interfaces for credentialing and limiting voting access to just those with rights to do so. For example, Zoom itself has the easiest to use tools for voting and seeking recognition out of any of the software we looked at. Unfortunately, there is no way to use those tools while limiting their use only to eligible voters, unless you prevent attendance by anyone other than those who are eligible.

We collected software suggestions from peer organizations in Greek circles, as well as through lists compiled by members of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE). Additionally, we had experience and existing vendor relationships from previous research in looking for possible chapter voting solutions, or in-person congress voting solutions. Meridia was one of the vendors suggested by numerous ASAE organizations, and after conducting multiple demos and discussions on our needs, they stood out as the best overall solution.

A leading value of Meridia, that we did not find in other software we researched, was the ability to not know in advance who the day's delegate would be, yet still validate them as an individual. This was necessary based on our standard practice and bylaws that allow a wide range of eligible brothers to serve as the delegate on any particular day.

We used Meridia for the Provincial Council meetings in February mostly with success, and took our lessons learned from that experience, along with enhancements to the Meridia system in part based on our feedback, to use Meridia again for Grand Chapter Congress.

I want to be clear that the decision to use Meridia was not based on cost, nor correlated in any way to our existing technology suite. We chose Meridia because it was the best solution reviewed based on our stated needs and use case.

The central plan prior to the start of Congress was to use two separate applications to conduct business. The first – Zoom, which would provide a room in which the delegates could speak and

other brothers could view as guests to each meeting of the Grand Chapter Congress session. While Zoom provided the room to speak in, Meridia (or TownVote) would provide the avenue to credential and provide our attendees the opportunity to vote and be recognized to speak.

While much of the Meridia platform was the same as during the spring Provincials, there had been several updates and enhancements. The primary update we would utilize during GCC was a speaker's queue which allowed for delegates to identify if they wished to speak in favor or opposition of the motion, as well as putting them in a queue much like lining up at the mic in person. This was intended to help speed up the process of making motions and during discussion.

In the weeks leading up to Congress the Rules and Resolutions committee, staff and Chancellor developed contingencies for possible risk of a virtual Congress. The main categories identified were natural, man-made or technology failures.

In preparation of Congress we identified the biggest technological failure would be not being able to use the voting software. The Rules and Resolutions Committee, staff and Chancellor identified that if the voting software failed during a meeting there would be two steps. First we would move all non-voting delegates out of the main Zoom room and begin to live stream non-Ritual business on YouTube Live for the gallery. Secondly, instead of using the voting software we would begin with the speaker recognition tools and the polling system to conduct votes within Zoom. We would make non-voting members of the Grand Chapter Congress cohost so they would not be able to participate in the polling for voting so the vote's integrity would be maintained, however they would be able to still speak regarding motions. The only downfall to this plan was non-speaking members would not be able to have the floor yielded to them by delegates. This solution would allow the delegates to continue to move the business of the Fraternity forward while allowing all brothers to watch the proceedings of the Grand Chapter Congress.

Upon opening of GCC, we recognized additional instructions were needed to assist delegates in utilizing the speakers queue. We were able to address that better starting with that weekend's Provincial Sessions through more specific and repetitive instruction. So that this became an infrequent issue throughout the week where a delegate would be recognized despite their not intending to speak. In our ongoing feedback discussions with the voting software company, we have suggested adding the ability to customize the page delegates see, in hopes that would further improve that experience.

We also added instructions to the Zoom screen and chat to provide delegates direct instructions on accessing the voting software. To ensure all delegates in the Zoom were also logging into the voting tool, we increased the pre-meeting audio announcements of credentialing instructions, as well as increasing the frequency of the voting instructions slide appearing on the Zoom screen. Credentials immediately assisted any delegates reaching out via chat or email with questions to access the voting tool. Any delegate requests sent to volunteer leaders or other Zoom hosts were also directed to the credentials team to provide direct assistance.

One issue that we experienced throughout the event was a small number of delegates having their session timeout and losing connection with the voting software. This issue is caused by the user's device, not the software itself, and is different for each device based on personal settings and device in use. The most significant avoidance tactic for this issue is to use a laptop or tablet instead of a phone for voting. We expressed this request numerous times in pre-event materials, and when a delegate expressed challenges, we would further encourage them to

switch to these other types of devices. For the second weekend of meetings, we added additional instructions read by the Chancellor before each vote that would help the delegates self-identify if they were having a problem, and took additional steps of having more "test votes" in advance of the start of the meeting, and further instructions by the Chancellor during the session on what to do if a delegate did not feel they were seeing what they were supposed to see.

While the standing rules included a policy that connectivity issues by delegates would not negate the validity of a vote, it was never our desire to have to rely on that clause. From the start, the desire was to ensure every voice was heard. In that spirit, prior to closing a vote, the Chancellor confirmed with the team that there were no known issues having been reported and not yet resolved during the voting period.

While recognizing these steps taken to mitigate any challenges, we have no doubt the votes themselves taken through the Meridia voting software were valid, trustworthy, and in compliance with Fraternity Ritual, Bylaws, and Policy.

By far the most challenging incident of the Congress occurred during General Business Session #2 on Saturday of the second weekend of Congress, which was kicked off by needing to stop use of the Meridia voting software. After experiencing no issues throughout the credentialing process and the Grand President caucus on Saturday (as well as no issues during the opening session on August 5th, or the provincial caucuses the prior weekend), we began to experience issues when we tried to start the VPF Q&A. When we launched the speaker's queue for the Q&A, the screen in the voting software admin panel did not load.

We quickly moved to non-business items to allow staff and volunteers time to assess if we could continue with the original plan or needed to use one of the contingency plans. We were able to immediately connect via phone with our team at Meridia and began troubleshooting with them. After some initial steps by the Meridia team, we thought we would be able to restart voting, but would require re-credentialing of all delegates. Initially the decision was made that we would do that, however as that process began we saw that the previous session was caught in a sort of limbo, and some delegates were bypassing the credentialing process. At that time, we did not feel we could use the voting software while maintaining the integrity of the votes and delegate body, and thus we had to go to a plan B. The second we did not have faith in the software, we deemed it no longer a viable option. This is important to note as it is because of that decision we are able to say confidently that we have faith in all votes taken throughout the conference.

While we hoped this would not occur, we did have backup plans in place should we for any reason lose access to the voting software.

The plan we would implement based on the parameters, would be to launch the YouTube livestream for the gallery, and keep delegates in the Zoom to use the polling options. Unfortunately, for reasons we do not and likely never will fully understand, we were unable to achieve the streaming aspect of the plan. In order to continue, we would either have to end the meeting and start it back up again in hopes we could stream live to YouTube but would possibly lose people on the call. At that point, we went to our third backup plan of creating a delegate-only breakout room to allow delegates to discuss how they wanted to proceed.

With this information, we brought the delegates into a Zoom breakout room— along with the then current leadership team and the Grand President candidates. The chair then provided a

current status of the situation and explained it appeared the backup plans were also not available. The chair presented the delegates with two options of either staying for the remainder of the afternoon and finishing the business scheduled for the day—which would mean moving to a session where there would be no audience or gallery, or recess until the following day and try to accomplish all business on Sunday. The floor was then opened for general discussion outside of normal parliamentary procedures, so delegates could ask questions of the chair. The chair noted that if we were unable to finish the business of the day by 5 p.m. Eastern, we would break in order to allow delegates to switch with alternates, and if the chair saw a major drop in delegate count at the break or when called back to order, a report of the credentials committee for a new count of delegates would be presented. If quorum was maintained, we would finish the business of the day.

In the breakout room, the delegates were able to discuss and ultimately made a motion to vote to continue with the business of the day. The delegates motioned to continue with the business of the day via Zoom with delegates, Grand officers, the officers elect, and GP candidates, with a count of 116-76.

We then completed the business of the day, including the votes on the Special and Emergency Amendments, and the Ritual Amendments using the Zoom voting tools and without the presence of guests.

After the close of the day's meeting, we switched our attention back to the issues with the Meridia system and worked with the vendor to diagnose the issue, resolve the issue, and ensure we again felt comfortable with the validity of votes using that system.

In terms of cause, what we have been told by the vendor is that there was an out-of-maintenance-window update pushed to their Azure server that hosts the voting software. This update caused a change to the Azure SSL Certificate being used to secure the session between our admin panel and their server. All of this combined for an interruption in the connection and ultimately a backlog and interrupted session causing the issues we experienced. Meridia made adjustments to the type of SSL certificate we were using, which we were able to update that evening, and through much testing both Saturday night and Sunday morning, we felt comfortable using the software again Sunday afternoon.

The fixes implemented worked, as we did not experience any additional issues with the systems during the Sunday session.

After the close of the Sunday session, and thus the close of Congress, we did receive messages from five delegates who expressed a belief that their vote was not cast in the elections for Grand President and/or Vice President-Finance. As Nominations Chair I reached out to each delegate, and after reviewing information from those delegates who responded back, we do not have reason to believe there was any sort of widespread system issue that would negate the validity of the votes.

To clarify: despite Chancellor McDaniel announcing numerous times the vote was open, and what to do if delegates were experiencing issues, no issues were brought to the attention of anyone in nominations, credentials, any of the Zoom hosts, or anyone else who would be considered "on the podium" or part of the Congress team prior to the close of the Congress. Also, similar to an in-person election, as the votes are anonymous, we do not have a mechanism of validating who did or did not vote. We only know counts of votes cast compared to the number of credentialed delegates - which was on par with, and actually a higher

percentage than other votes cast throughout the Congress. Lastly, it is important to note that for every election, even uncontested races, the candidate's teller was given the opportunity to challenge the results prior to them being announced.

As Nominations Chair, Tricia Smith concluded that all voting and election results were conducted as defined in our Bylaws and are a valid and fair reflection of the delegate's votes. With that, in conducting review of our standard procedures for Grand Chapter Congress in order to transition it to a virtual format, she believes we have identified many ways that we can improve our processes for the future – even when we are back in person. Including parliamentary review of our standard GCC proceedings, review of associated policies and bylaws, additional training for delegates/tellers/moderators, and implementation of a voting software tool for in person GCC.

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While we did experience issues as outlined, overall the processes and plans we put in place provided for a fair and full legislative session in even these unique circumstances. The team of staff and volunteers that worked hard to ensure we had plans, backup plans, and backups to the backup plans, along with the delegates who dedicated their time and voice to the betterment of the Fraternity, worked together to ensure that we had a successful Grand Chapter Congress. Yes, there were opportunities for improvement, but brothers should feel proud of the event, and feel confident the voices of delegates were heard.