

## **Vigil - What are they? Should I have one?**

A vigil is something very personal. Apart from some historical background, this document will mostly reflect what I did and why.

### **Some historical information**

Traditionally a young boy of the knightly class would start his military training as a page. In his early teens, the boy would most likely become a squire. This was typically when the real training took off. Many knights were made in their early youth. However, you could be made knight as an adult or even mature man.

A vigil as we typically understand it was held in a chapel, praying, contemplating and fasting all night. In the morning, there would be a bath, and investiture with a white robe. A baptism could also be included in the ceremony (either at the end of the vigil or during the knighting ceremony).

### **Limitations within the SCA**

Typically, we do not do religious ceremonies as a formal part of the SCA. But there is nothing that prevent you and any number of friends getting together to have/hold a mass, as long as it is not formally part of the event. It would be perfectly acceptable to have a mass as part of your vigil. However, holding mass as part of the knighting ceremony in court would not be acceptable. After all, the vigil is something private and personal, court is an official part of the SCA.

### **Vigil or not?**

First of all, a vigil is something highly personal. As far as I know, no one is really “forcing” you to have one. But I strongly recommend holding one. The reason is that some of my very best moments in the SCA have been at vigils. The discussions at most vigils I’ve been to whether for a Pelican, Laurel or Knight have often been about SCA philosophy and politics. (Not all politics is bad!). Having a vigil can serve several functions. The focus will be on you in the SCA. And you will have access to a lot of people that have gone through what you are about to go through.

### **What kind of Vigil can I have?**

There are a number of different types of vigil you can choose between. Some of the most common ones are:

- A big party, where people are feasting and drinking all night.
- A secret, closed gathering by invitation only
- A closed gathering for members of the order only
- A closed gathering for members of the peerage orders only
- A gathering open to all
- An open gathering which is preceded by a closed session with the members of the order before opening up to the general populace)

What should you choose? Well, as I have said earlier, the vigil is about you. I personally always preach for an open vigil. My reasoning is that is that you are not being made a peer, you are being recognized as one. Even though the event is about you it often means a lot to others, especially your friends and the people that did not get invited.

### **Does it have to be all night?**

No. Many people have children, other obligations, medical conditions etc that require them to have a good night's sleep. Some people expect it to be an all night vigil but I have never heard a harsh word spoken about someone choosing to not hold an all night vigil, regardless of the reason.

### **My vigil**

It took me a couple of days to decide if I should have a vigil or not. I felt that I probably had heard and seen it all - I was about to be knighted a few months before my fortieth birthday. But then my lady showed me that it was not uncommon for "old men" to be knighted in the medieval times and they too might have had a vigil. Adding to that, I had the opportunity to create that magic moment for other people that I had enjoyed so many times before. I decided to publicly announce the vigil and invite everyone.

My vigil started by my being escorted from court by the chivalry. After a couple of hours with the chivalry, the doors to our pavilion were opened up to everyone. I provided some light refreshments, I was also presented with food and drinks for the guests as a gift by friends, but it never turned into a party. In the event, the vigil became exactly what I had hoped for. Mostly we talked about SCA philosophy and politics, running well into the night. But being a reasonably responsible father of two young girls, I needed a few hours sleep, so by about 3 A.M. I told all the guests that it was time for a period of "quiet contemplation" (i.e. it was time for me to catch some sleep).

The following days, I had several people coming up and thanking me for the opportunity to attend my vigil and told me that it had been a very special and magic night.

### **Not sure yet?**

My best memories from my knighting are actually from the vigil. It was very magical and enriching. It was a unique opportunity to achieve such a moment, and I would not have wanted to miss it for the world.

In your service  
Sir Asbjorn Pedersen Marsvin  
Kingdom of Lochac  
AkA Martin Forest  
New Zealand