



August 6, 2020

Brethren:

The members of the Grand Lodge's COVID-19 Committee submitted a host of recommendations for safe engagement during this pandemic, recommendations that included how Degree work might be performed. Our Board of Custodians, with vital assistance from our Monitors, took that list and worked diligently to incorporate it into our Ritual. The Custodians just completed their analysis and the recommendations were submitted to me. With grateful thanks, I hereby give the following list the force of edict in this Jurisdiction:

- (1) The current prohibition against individual Lodges performing Degree work remains.
- (2) In the near term, the First Degree may be presented in a specific temporary presentational format with the following restrictions:
 - A. The Degree cast will consist of members certified by the Board of Custodians. The Area Custodian will be responsible to develop the final cast roster, which of necessity will also include Masons from his area to fill other roles and lectures.
 - B. The "candidate" will also be a member of the Degree cast. Actual candidates for these Entered Apprentice presentations will be observers only.
 - C. Area Deputies, coordinating with the Area Custodian and the Grand Lodge Office, will arrange and organize the EA Degree presentations. In considering a location, sufficient space for physical distance with an HVAC system providing negative airflow are the principle considerations. While Lodge buildings are always preferable, it may be that a larger space rented by the Grand Lodge is necessary.
 - D. Neither meals nor refreshments will be served.
 - E. Once a date and location has been selected, it will be each Lodge's responsibility to register their candidate(s) for the Degree. While a Lodge may register for any date or location in the Jurisdiction, in those cases where attendance is limited, preference will be given to candidates from the given Area.
 - F. Candidate registration must be made with the Grand Lodge Office. The preferred method is by utilizing the Grand View system whenever possible. Petitioners can be entered as soon as a petition is received; it is not necessary to wait for any other action by the Lodge to begin this process.
 - G. An RSVP to the Grand Lodge Office will be required by all attendees so that capacity restrictions may be adhered to. Due to space restrictions, it may be that a candidate may not be able attend a given degree and must wait for another.

ETHAN A. SEABERG

Grand Master 2020-2021

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H. Lodges are also responsible for providing a Mentor/Guide for their candidates. If a Lodge has more than one candidate, and attendance must be limited because of space restrictions, they may then provide no more than one Master Mason for each three candidates. If there is adequate room at the chosen location, however, a one-to-one ratio is preferable.

I. The Grand Lodge will not charge fees to either the candidates or Lodges for these 1st Degree presentations. However, each Lodge should charge their candidates according to their normal Degree fee schedule. Please note that all other Masonic rules apply regarding reading petitions, investigating, and balloting for each candidate, etc.

J. At the event, Lodges are responsible for providing the Candidate's apron, as well as any other material that they normally provide. Nothing will be provided by the Grand Lodge for any candidate.

Should these events prove successful, or maybe "workable" is a better word, it is my hope that the other Degrees will follow. Unless current circumstances change however (and wouldn't it be wonderful if they did), I do not anticipate adding the Fellowcraft or Master Mason Degrees for the remainder of 2020.

It's quite likely, especially if you're from a Lodge blessed with Entered Apprentices and Fellowcrafts in waiting, that this temporary focus on the First Degree isn't temporary enough. The cry has already gone up "How do we keep them engaged?!?" or "How do we keep them period?!?" Two responses come to mind. First, the Grand Lodge Mentoring Committee has created a wonderful handbook with strategies and best practices to mentor and thereby enrich the Masonic experience from pre-petition to the grave. Use it. Refer especially to those sections that recommend relationship-building, remembering that except for an open Fellowcraft or Master Mason Lodge there's nothing these men can't be involved in. Second, and I submit this to you respectfully, if a prospective candidate rejects Minnesota Masonry because during a global pandemic, and out of concern for the safety of our membership, he has to wait a few months for Degree work . . . well, the West gate may be properly closed to him.

Finally, I would gently remind us all that we once heard these words from Job, "For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease." Hope is not one of Freemasonry's virtues by accident. Cling to it, and I beg you to engage smartly and enthusiastically in every way this insidious pandemic allows.

Fraternal regards,

Ethan A. Seaberg
Grand Master