



PROTOCOL & ETIQUETTE ESSENTIALS

Prepared by the Grand Lodge P. & E. Committee
Issue No. 26 – First Issued July 2013 – Revised May 2020

Greetings from Your P. & E. Committee

Welcome to the latest issue of “*P&E Essentials*”. It is anticipated that these informative and easy-to-read newsletters will be published several times a year.

“*P&E Essentials*” is intended to be an interactive instrument, designed to help you make a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge. The Committee welcomes questions and/or suggestions for topics that could be addressed in future issues. Questions or suggestions not related to Protocol and Etiquette will be forwarded to the appropriate Grand Lodge Committee for response.

Committee Members

The current Protocol & Etiquette Committee members are:

Gordon Crutcher (*Chairman*); Steven Armstrong; William Elliott; Saliem Khoury; Michael Litvak; George McCowan; Bryan Middleton; Richard Morreau; James Pearson; George Pohle; David Purvis (*Secretary*); Brian Seabourn; David Stevens; and Terrance Van Horne.

With appropriate advance notice – and subject to travel constraints – any member of the Committee would be happy to make a presentation about P&E in your Lodge, or at a District Meeting.

THE COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY

Several requests have been received seeking information concerning the protocol relating to a Committee of Inquiry, how it should function and what privacy standards should be observed, if any.

As aptly described in the *Lodge Officers Manual* of the Grand Lodge of Maine, the Committee of Inquiry is in reality a Masonic sentry. It must ensure that no man who is not fit for the teachings and blessings of Freemasonry shall pass through the West Gate to initiation.

Members of the Committee of Inquiry are answerable to no one except their conscience. Their Lodge and Freemasonry are dependent upon

their efforts and judgment. They are screening a person who can make the structure of Freemasonry either strong or weak.

From a “procedural” perspective, the topic of application for membership (both for initiation and affiliation) is covered in Sections 307 - 323 and Sections 358 - 368 of our *Book of Constitution*.

Anyone serving on a Committee of Inquiry should be familiar with all these Sections - but especially the following two Sections.

First is Section 318, which states:

“Each application, having been read in open lodge, **shall be referred forthwith to a committee of inquiry** of 3 or more Master Masons appointed by the Master, none of whom shall have proposed or seconded the application. The committee shall inquire into the character and qualifications of the applicant and shall report in writing thereon to the lodge at its next regular meeting held after the lapse of not less than four weeks, or as soon as possible thereafter.”

(Editor’s Note: At our Annual Communication in July 2006, a Constitutional amendment was passed which deleted the word “forthwith” from Section 318.)

The other is Section 355, which reads:

“No brother shall violate the secrecy of the ballot by stating how he voted or intended to vote (except as provided for under Masonic Trials), or by endeavouring to ascertain how a brother voted, or by revealing a brother’s vote.”

It will be left to others more familiar with the Canadian Federal Privacy Laws than myself to comment as to the extent that the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents*

Please share this newsletter with other members of your Lodge – and your Masonic friends

Act (PIPEDA) applies to a Committee of Inquiry. Suffice it to say that our Grand Lodge respects all information of a personal nature which is entrusted to us by applicants (and by our members). Individual lodges are urged to do the same.

You should be aware there is currently no requirement in our Constitution that the identity of anyone appointed to a Committee of Inquiry be kept confidential from other members, (the deletion of the word “forthwith” in 2006 notwithstanding).

Lodges can definitely continue to use the historical method of appointing a committee whose composition is known to all members. It is of utmost importance, however, that the provisions of Section 355 not be compromised. Thus no one is entitled to know – or attempt to learn - how any particular member of the Committee voted on the applicant.

(For further information on this point, please refer to the clarification issued on September 12, 2007, by the Grand Secretary.)

Lodge members who feel they have information about an applicant relevant to the inquiry can share it directly with any member of the committee.

The following two questions in the “General Questions” section of the Q&A booklet (2013 edition) also pertain to the Committee of Inquiry:

110.Q. Is the membership informed as to who is on the Committee of Inquiry, and do they have the right to question the Committee on their report?

- A. Section 318 of the *Book of Constitution* requires that a Committee of three Master Masons be appointed by the Master and they report in writing at the next regular meeting.

Although it is not indicated in the Section, this report, in reality, is a miniature ballot. While the names of the members of the Committee can be made known to other members of the lodge, it would therefore be most inappropriate for anyone to make enquiries as to the individual decision reached by any of the member of the Committee. Similarly, no one has the right to question the Committee’s report. (See the *Book of Constitution*, Sections 354 and 355.)

111.Q. Does an unfavourable report of the Committee of Inquiry require a motion?

- A. The report of the Committee of Inquiry must be received and adopted before the applicant is considered rejected.
(See Section 320 of the *Book of Constitution*.)

The Master shall thereupon declare the applicant rejected. When this happens the report of the Committee of Inquiry falls into the same category as an unfavourable ballot. (See Sections 321 and 322 of the *Book of Constitution*.)

The Process of Inquiry

(Extracted from a presentation by R.W. Bro. Brian Gilkinson)

The old adage that you get out of something what you put into it is as applicable to this process as any other. If the Committee of Inquiry works conscientiously and with a plan to obtain the most comprehensive knowledge possible about the petitioner and his circumstances, a quality decision on his suitability for initiation is the almost certain result.

The Committee can be composed of three or more Master Masons who have each demonstrated a commitment to the welfare of the Lodge. Any Master Mason should have the character and attributes necessary to make an informed decision as to the knowledge gained about a petitioner. However, not every Master Mason has the experience necessary to fashion an inquiry designed to attain that comprehensive knowledge. Therefore, there should be a component of experience on the Committee to assist in fully investigating the petitioner’s background and circumstances and to answer as many of the petitioner’s questions as possible.

The number “three” has a particular significance for Masons and that is the usual number of members comprising a Committee of Inquiry. That number allows for a divergence of opinions and a means of coming to a decision without a cumbersome, time-consuming process of trying to organize the efforts of a higher number of members.

Once the Committee of Inquiry has been appointed, it should move with dispatch. The petitioner has expressed a desire to become a member after no doubt giving the matter considerable thought. He has had the benefit of speaking to at least the two Masons who signed his petition for initiation. His sponsors have informed him of the excellence of the organization and the qualifications of its members.

He may have known and admired Masons for the manner in which they conducted themselves in their daily affairs. The act of signing a petition is a serious business for him and he has a right to have that petition considered promptly and seriously by the

Lodge. The members of the Committee may be his first contact with Masons he does not know.

The contact should occur promptly and the Committee members should bear in mind that they will also be conveying information to him as they seek information from him. The impression the petitioner gets from the Committee about Masons doing Masonic business is important. It may impact his desire to proceed further or to be meaningfully involved once accepted.

Section 318 of the Constitution provides that the report of the Committee should be received at the next regular meeting of the Lodge held after a lapse of no less than four weeks, or as soon as possible thereafter.

Meet with the petitioner and his family in his home, if possible. It should be obvious to all that membership in Freemasonry necessarily impacts families. If we are sincere about the priorities, we expect our members to assign to the importance of family and employment responsibilities, we need to affirm that message right off the bat with spouses and children. Spouses may not have experience with other Masons but they may have gained an impression of Masonry, (and not always a positive one), by speaking with the spouses of Masons.

Family members may well have questions with respect to time and financial commitments and other things. The members of the Committee should anticipate these questions and be ready to speak informatively and to address sincerely any concerns expressed. The Committee needs to be of one mind on the issues if it is to appear knowledgeable and engender confidence. Be aware that the question plan suggested below can be completed with information coming from sources other than the petitioner – and indeed it should. This third party information can start coming from other family members during the meeting with the petitioner.

The Committee should not confine its efforts to investigate the character of the petitioner to just an interview with him. The duty of the Committee is to gather information in which it has confidence. This information should be comprehensive in nature and by which a thoroughly defensible decision on the suitability of the petitioner for membership can be made. Even in a relatively mobile society like ours, there are always opportunities to determine the identity of others who know the petitioner, both within and outside of the fraternity. The Committee should approach those whose opinions it respects

and ask them many of the same questions put to the petitioner. This is a good method of gauging the reliability of the information he provided to the Committee and hence, his credibility.

It is most preferable that negative concerns with acceptance of an applicant be resolved prior to the Ballot process to avoid disharmony amongst the members.

The Interview

These seven words may be of assistance in an interview:

- WHO** - is he?
 - does he know?
 - does he associate with?
- WHEN** - did he become interested in Masonry?
 - did he come to this District?
- WHAT** - are his reasons for petitioning?
 - is his profession?
 - is his standing in the community?
 - is his general reputation at work?
 - is his attitude towards a Supreme Being?
- WHERE** - does he live? How long?
 - did he come from?
 - does he spend his leisure time?
- WHY** - is he seeking membership?
 - did he wait until now?
 - is he petitioning your Lodge?
- HOW** - does he intend to serve Freemasonry?
 - does he intend to conduct himself?
 - has he lived in the past?
- DON'T** - look at a man and think he is alright.
 - think that he will necessarily reform.
 - be guided by only his own reports.
 - be afraid to ask questions.
 - report until you are satisfied.
 - leave the investigation until the last minute.
 - leave the real work of the Committee to the other two members.
 - forget that he may be the Master of your Lodge some day.

For more information pertaining to the Committee of Inquiry, please refer to pp. 30 - 31 of *Towards The Square*, as well as **Section 4.9.7** of the *Lodge Resources Manual*, a copy of which is posted on the Grand Lodge web site.

You can request a direct e-mail subscription to *P. & E. Essentials* from: Gordon@Crutcher.ca