



Ensuring the Timeless Vitality of Freemasonry in Ontario

PROTOCOL & ETIQUETTE ESSENTIALS

Prepared by the Grand Lodge P. & E. Committee
Issue No. 29 – First Issued March 2014 – Revised May 2020

Greetings from Your P. & E. Committee

Welcome to the March 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. It will hopefully also assist you to achieve high quality in the delivery, comprehension and insight of the lessons communicated on the floor of the lodge. 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; Art DiCecco; David Fernandes; Dennis Hawman; Saliem Khoury; Michael Litvak; George McCowan; Bryan Middleton; James Pearson; George Pohle; David Purvis (*Secretary*); David Stevens; and Refik Yoney.

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.

VISITATION AND A BOARD OF TRIAL

As a Mason, you belong to one of the world’s greatest fraternities and institutions. It affords you many rights and privileges. One of these is the privilege of visiting other Lodges.

It doesn’t matter whether these Lodges may be located nearby, or even in a different country, far away. As another Mason, you would be made welcome at most of their meetings.

This privilege of visitation, however, is of necessity, accompanied by a responsibility.

First of all, **you** are responsible to ascertain, before you visit a Lodge, that it is recognized by our Grand Lodge. This

responsibility is easy to discharge when you visit another Lodge in this Province, and indeed, in this country. It is a little more complicated, however, when you wish to visit a Lodge in a foreign country.

Your Lodge Secretary has a list of all Lodges and Grand Lodges which are recognized by our Grand Lodge and with whom you may enjoy fraternal relations.

Your Secretary should keep this list in the front of your Lodge Register, where it is available for all members to review, at any time. If it is not there, you should ask him for it.

The list is also posted on our Grand Lodge web site.

The Grand Secretary and his staff have a book, called the “*Pantagraph*”, which lists jurisdictions throughout the world. It might be that the location you are planning to visit does not have its own Grand Lodge but instead has a District or Provincial Grand Lodge of one of the Grand Lodges of England, Ireland or Scotland. (These are located all over the world.) If so, they will be so listed in the *Pantagraph*.

You have another responsibility to address before you can visit another Lodge. You have to be able to prove to that Lodge that you are indeed a Mason.

No Lodge will welcome you until they are certain that you are a Mason. The easiest way for this to be done is to have another Mason vouch for you. This other Mason could be a member of your Lodge, or of the Lodge you intend to visit, or indeed a member of any Lodge.

The only requirements are that he must have sat in open Lodge with you on a previous occasion and that he is known by the host Lodge to be a Mason, or he can prove to them that he is a Mason.

But what if there isn’t anyone present who can vouch that you are indeed a Mason? Then the responsibility for proof rests entirely upon your own shoulders.

You should always carry a current paid-up dues card with you, to show you are a member in good standing with your own Lodge. **If you are not in good standing in the jurisdiction to which you belong, then you are not in good standing anywhere.**

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

It wouldn't hurt to have a recent Lodge summons with you, especially if it happens to mention your name. The summons may indicate that you are, or have been, a Lodge Officer. If you are a fairly new Mason, it may contain a reference to your passing or raising.

What other documents could you carry? Well, if you're really organized and have planned your visit well in advance, your Lodge Secretary could provide you with a Letter of Good Standing, on Lodge letterhead. Such a letter should be signed and sealed.

If you're super organized (and there's sufficient time to do so), you could ask your Lodge Secretary to send a letter to the other Lodge, advising them in advance of your forthcoming visit, about your intentions. If the other Lodge is in another Jurisdiction, your Lodge Secretary must request our Grand Secretary to write such a letter to the Grand Lodge of the Jurisdiction you wish to visit. This way they will be expecting you.

You could also carry your Grand Lodge certificate, (the one you received after you completed your Third Degree). If you have misplaced this certificate, you can obtain a replacement from Grand Lodge, (through your Lodge Secretary), for a \$15 fee.

While not a requirement, consider preparing a short summary of your personal contact information, as well as your Masonic background and current status, (some basic details that would fit on a 3" by 5" index card). You could then have this card ready to give to the Lodge you intend to visit.

This summary could include such information as:

- Your name, personal address, and profession;
- Your Lodge's full name and address;
- The name of your Grand Lodge and its address;
- The dates and place you were initiated, passed and raised;
- What Masonic offices you may have held (e.g. W. M. of your Lodge).

Such a card could assist to expedite the examining process, one that the Lodge you are trying to visit is likely to insist upon.

A current Canadian passport can also be very useful. While it wouldn't prove that you are a Mason, it would attest to your personal identity and that you are indeed the person named on your dues card.

In addition to carrying appropriate documentation, you should be prepared to be examined by members of the Lodge you will be visiting. This committee will certainly want to see your documentation. However, in case it may be forged, they will also ask you sufficient questions in order to satisfy themselves that you are a Mason. This examining process is called a **Board of Trial**.

You will likely be asked to take something called a **Tyler's Oath**. This oath can be found on page 169 of our current (2019) Grand Lodge Book of Constitution. You don't have to have the words memorized, (although you would obviously make a favourable impression upon the other Lodge's examining committee if you did).

This oath attests that you are a Master Mason, that you belong to a just and legally constituted Lodge, that you are not suspended or expelled from your Lodge, and that you know of no reason why you should not hold Masonic communication with the Lodge you are visiting.

If you have undergone a Board of Trial before, you will have a general idea what to expect. If you haven't, it would be a good idea to ask one of the more experienced members of your Lodge about the kind of questions you are likely to be asked. You should definitely learn the modes of recognition in each Degree.

Now, let's look at the second aspect of responsibility that accompanies visitations, namely the responsibility of the Lodge which you are visiting to satisfy themselves that you are indeed a Mason.

In our Grand Jurisdiction, this responsibility is described in Sections 213 – 216 of our Book of Constitution. Every Worshipful Master should be familiar with these Sections, or at least aware that they exist, so he can refer to them when he learns that a visitor seeks admission to his Lodge.

If there is no one to vouch for the visitor, then it is the Master's responsibility to appoint a committee to conduct a Board of Trial to examine the visitor. Although he could also be a member of this committee, it is more likely that the Master will ask at least two other Master Masons to serve on the committee. At least one of them should be an Installed Master.

Great care should be taken by the Master in appointing members to a Board of Trial, to ensure not only that they are qualified but that they fully understand their function.

The committee should itself be familiar with Sections 213 – 216 of the Book of Constitution, so they can comply with its requirements.

You may have thought wouldn't it be nice if Grand Lodge would prepare and distribute a set of standard questions that the committee could ask during a Board of Trial. Then all you would have to do is get that list from your Secretary, pose all or some of the questions to the visitor, and your job is finished.

If there was such a list, how long do you think it would take before it fell into the wrong hands? Before it was posted on the internet? What a sham and disservice it would be if all an impostor had to do was obtain a copy of the list, do a little research to try and figure out the answers, then pass himself off as a Mason.

The Examining Committee will meet with the visitor in a private area, such as the anteroom, outside of the actual Lodge room itself. If there is more than one visitor, each should be examined individually and privately. (If all the visitors know each other – perhaps they belong to the same Lodge – you could examine one and he could then vouch for the rest.)

Incidentally, as pointed out by Frederick Smyth, the proper term for such a brother, in Masonic parlance, is **visitor**, and not guest. A visitor comes to see. The word is derived from the Latin, *visitare* = *to go to see for a purpose*. (A guest is typically invited to visit.) It is yet another subtle semantic symbol in our Masonic usage.

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It is important that the Committee treat the visitor with courtesy, respect, and expediency. Don't automatically assume he is a Cowan and adopt a hostile or unfriendly attitude toward him. Your only aim is to satisfy yourself that the visitor is indeed a brother.

This is not an opportunity for you to show off how much YOU may know about Masonry, or how skilled YOU are in our ritual. Do not embarrass him, or belittle him, or diminish his enthusiasm for the Craft by asking trick questions he is unlikely able to answer. Find out at what stage his Masonic development and experience may be, then pose your questions accordingly.

Bear in mind that a Board of Trial is not an examination to test the skill level of the visitor but rather to ascertain if he is qualified to enter the Lodge in the Degree which is to be worked, and to see if he has the documentation to prove that he is a paid up member in good standing.

You want to put the visitor at ease. Give him the benefit of courtesy and friendliness. Exercise care, tact and good judgement.

He may never have undergone this procedure before. He is bound to be nervous. His knowledge of the ritual may be imperfect. If you perceive that he is becoming "out of his depth" when he is replying to your questions, suggest to him to describe in his own words how he was prepared for each Degree and what happened to him during the Degree. Always keep in mind that true Masonry lies far beyond the mere ability to recite its ritual and ceremony.

No matter his age, the visitor may have only recently become a Master Mason and is now eager to expand his Masonic horizons, to see what the interior of other Lodge buildings are like, to make new friends, and to become more familiar with our ritual. Don't make him sorry that he picked your Lodge to accomplish these wonderful goals.

If he is from another Grand Jurisdiction, the signs and words that the visitor uses may not be exactly the same as ours. For example, in an American Lodge, the "Master's word" is something very different than what we would give in our Grand Jurisdiction.

All a visitor knows is what he was taught in his mother Lodge. But you should have no difficulty in recognizing the similarities.

Our Constitution requires all visitors to sign the Visitor's Register of the Lodge. Technically, this should be done after he has passed a satisfactory Board of Trial. However, if the register is signed beforehand, while the visitor is awaiting his Board of Trial, this would enable one member of the Examining Committee to compare that signature with the one on the visitor's Dues Card.

If satisfactory answers are given, the Board will return to the Lodge and make their report to the Worshipful Master. Provided that he is also in agreement, the Worshipful Master will permit the visiting brother to enter the Lodge – either with, or without ceremony.

It is the prerogative of the Master of a Lodge to refuse to admit any visitor if he is not satisfied that he is a regular

Mason of good standing, or if he feels that such a proposed visitor will disturb the harmony of his Lodge. He has the final say. Section 213 of our Constitution specifically gives him this power of discretion.

A visitor may be refused admittance for reasons that do not reflect on him personally. Such an occasion might be when a particularly sensitive piece of Lodge business is about to be conducted, or if a reprimand is to be administered.

The formal examination of visitors is held to be of such high importance by Masons that it is actually the subject of one of our Ancient Charges and Regulations. During the Ceremony of Installation, every Master-elect is required to give his unqualified assent to the following question: "*You agree that no visitors shall be received into your Lodge without due examination and producing proper vouchers for their having been initiated into a regular Lodge?*"

While it is the Master's responsibility to guard the sanctity of his Lodge, it is possible to be overzealous in doing so. Find that appropriate medium between extreme caution and that of careless indifference, one that best suits your Lodge and your intuition concerning a particular visitor.

While commendable and, perhaps, even appropriate under certain circumstances, consider the following lesson, which is based on the precepts of extreme caution.

In Dr. Albert Mackey's Encyclopedia, written in 1874, under the topic "Examination of Visitors", it is written that "*. . . in Freemasonry, it is better that ninety and nine true men should be turned away from the door of a Lodge than that one Cowan should be admitted.*"

Contrast the mindset which such a severe tenet implies, however, with the following more enlightened, open-minded and constructive comments by the Grand Lodge of Virginia, made some 130 years later:

"Do you examine visiting brethren to get them IN, or to keep them OUT?"

And most importantly -

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

SUGGESTED READINGS

- (1) BROTHER TO BROTHER – Pathway to Improved Membership Retention (2020 Edition), Section 11.6 *Visitations*. (Log onto the Grand Lodge web site, *Members Area*; then click *Grand Lodge>>B2B*)
- (2) MASONIC VISITATION by Norman Senn, PDDGM, Grand Lodge of Alberta, pp. 284-291 in Volume III of *The Pyramid Texts*. Web reference: <http://www.acgl.us/index.php/pyramid>
- (3) MASONIC VISITATIONS by Gus J. Elbert Life Member: Arabian Lodge #882, pp. 291-296, *Ibid*.
- (4) GIVE AND TAKE A BOARD OF TRIAL by M.W. Bro. Raymond S. J. Daniels, PGM and Former Chairman of the Masonic Education Committee, February 8, 2001.

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