

**Grand Chapter Royal Arch Masons
In Virginia**



**Office of the Grand High Priest
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June 15, 2020

To: Mt Excellent Sirs, Right Excellent Sirs, Excellent Sirs, and My Companions All:

Reopening Royal Arch Chapters in Virginia

On June 5, 2020, Virginia entered the second phase of the “Virginia Forward” reopening plan (Executive Order 65). Accordingly, effective **July 1, 2020 (subject to adjustment)**, Chapters holden under the Grand Chapter Royal Arch Masons in Virginia may resume their regularly scheduled stated convocations in compliance with section 97 of the Digest of the Laws, Rules and Regulations.

Until September 1, 2020 (*subject to extension if necessary*), the High Priest has the prerogative to not hold a stated convocation if he believes such action is in the best interest of preserving the health and safety of the members of the Chapter or if the Chapter is unable to abide by the protocols set forth herein. Should the High Priest choose to exercise this option, he must promptly communicate his decision to his District Deputy Grand High Priest who will, in turn, notify the Administrative Assistant to the Grand High Priest and the Grand Secretary. No dispensation is required.

Until further notice, no called or stated convocations for the purpose of conferring any of the Degrees as conferred in the Chapter shall be held in any Chapter holden under this Grand Chapter. A plan regarding the conferral of the Degrees will be forthcoming.

The High Priest is responsible for reopening the Chapter in a manner that promotes healthy practices and adheres to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines. This responsibility extends to all future Chapter gatherings beyond the initial reopening. The High Priest will inform the Companions by the usual means of communication (i.e., phone call, phone tree, email, trestle board, etc.) of the plan to either reopen the Chapter, or to not hold the stated convocation, at least 48 hours prior to the stated date.

The DDGHPs will provide oversight and, when necessary, guidance to the Chapters in their respective district; thereby, ensuring the Chapter is reopened in a manner that promotes healthy practices and adherence to CDC guidelines. While warmly welcoming members back, begin to prepare them now for the “new normal” that will be in place for the foreseeable future and encourage them to refrain from attending Chapter if they are not feeling well, and especially, if they are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms or if they have any related exposure whatsoever.

In compliance with the Phase II plan, social distancing with a minimum of 6 feet must be observed at all times and no more than 50 Companions, to include Chapter Officers, members and guests, may gather in the Chapter room at any given time or participate in a tiled convocation.

Prior to the first reopening meeting, the Chapter room must be thoroughly cleaned.

Until advised otherwise, meals, snacks and beverages before or after Chapter convocations will not be permitted.

Necessary signage no smaller than letter size page (8.5” x 11”) must be placed in a prominent area of all Chapter entrances. Signage must be posted warning members exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 or symptoms similar to refrain from entering the building. Signage must also be posted with appropriate public health warnings regarding public gatherings. Digital copies of the signs are included with this package.

Seating in the Chapter room must be marked and restricted to promote social distancing of at least 6 feet, including in front of and behind seats for Chapters with more than one aisle of seating. In some Chapter rooms, the use of folding chairs may be necessary to offset seating restrictions.

For your protection and the protection of those around you, masks are ***strongly encouraged*** for every member.

Hand sanitizer must be readily available throughout the Chapter room and hand soap must be available in all restrooms.

Until advised otherwise, sign in sheets are not permitted. The Secretary, or designee, should record attendance. Get well and sympathy cards should not be passed around the Chapter room for signature. No collection basket shall be passed around the Chapter room. Instead, a collection basket may be placed on the Secretary’s or Treasurer’s desk.

The Secretary and Treasurer will define protocols for safely transmitting routine communications, including cash, checks, deposit slips, and other communications. Such protocol may include electronic transactions whenever possible.

Both before and after convocation or other gatherings, practice routine cleaning of high contact areas and hard surfaces. This should include (but is not limited to): the arms of seats; handrails; staffs and gavels; pedestals and desktops; square and compass on Bible (not the actual Bible of course); door knockers and doorknobs; AC control pads; bathroom surfaces and handles.

The Grand Lecturer has prepared guidance on an alternative method for balloting and procedures for the apron and ballot box, which are included with this.

It is important at this time for the High Priest to plan Chapter Convocations that are not overly long. This will help minimize exposure and help keep members comfortable while operating under very different conditions.

Remember, the road back to normal will take some time. Every Chapter is going to be a little different, so in applying these protocols, be flexible and use your best judgement.

Common sense should rule the day!

Sincerely and fraternally,

Raymond D. Steele (sig)
Raymond D. Steele
Grand High Priest

TO: All Royal Arch Chapters in Virginia
FROM: Randall W. Johnson, Grand Lecturer
RE: Temporary Changes to Royal Arch Ritual due to the Coronavirus
(COVID-19)

June 15, 2020

Companions,

In accordance with the June 15, 2020 letter from Most Excellent Raymond D. Steele, Grand High Priest, and in addition to the instructions set forth in his letter, it becomes necessary to temporarily adjust our Ritual to insure the health and safety of our members so we may reopen our chapters. It is understood that you may have to do things a little differently, depending on your unique situation, but I'm sure that you will do your very best to keep everyone safe.

Opening and Closing the Chapter

All officers must be seated at least 6 feet apart (including High Priest, King and Scribe). All Ritual is to be used until after the duties of the HP are given. The HP will then rap up the Chapter. The Opening Prayer (The Lord's Prayer) is given in unison, the signs are given, and the Chapter is declared open. (The formation of the triangle for the prayer will be eliminated as well as the communication of the GORAW.) The Closing ceremony will be done in a corresponding manner. All Ritual is to be used until after the duties of the HP are given. After the duties of the HP are given, the HP will rap up the Chapter and give the Closing Prayer. The signs of the Royal Arch Degree will be given and the Chapter declared closed. Please keep in mind that no physical contact is to be made. I realize this may be confusing, but it is imperative to keep everyone safe.

Balloting

Everyone touching the ballot box and balloting must wear disposable gloves. The normal balloting procedure will be followed until after the HP says ... **Companion Captain of the Host, Prepare the ballot and present it in the East.** The COH places the ballot box on the podium in the East and steps back. The HP picks up the ballot box, removes the drawer and shows it to the King and then to the Scribe. He then places the ballot box back on the podium, deposits his ballot and takes his seat. The COH then takes the ballot box and places it on the Altar, north side of the Bible, and steps to the side as the Senior Deacon does in the Blue Lodge. The officers will then advance to the Altar and ballot their ballot **one at a time** according to the normal balloting sequence while maintaining a 6 foot distance from each other. Then the companions will advance and deposit their ballot **one at a time** while maintaining a 6 foot distance from each other. After all have balloted, the COH reports, **Most Excellent High Priest, the ballot is deposited.** After the HP says **Companion Captain of the Host, close the ballot and present it in the East,** the COH again places the ballot box on the podium in the East and steps back. The

HP removes the drawer checks the ballot and shows it to the King and then to the Scribe (or destroys it & reballot if necessary) and declares the results. He then destroys the ballot and again places the ballot box on the podium and takes his seat. The COH removes the ballot box from the podium and returns to his seat.

Aprons

Cloth aprons may still used in the Chapters. The virus can survive 12 - 14 days on the cloth. Since the stated convocations are usually 4 - 5 weeks apart, this should allow for safe virus free aprons.

Companions, these adjustments are intended to be only temporary until, hopefully, we can return to normal after this unprecedented health crises is over. I know that this may be confusing. If you have any questions please give me a call me (757-650-9358).

Please stay safe and remember **COMMON SENSE SHOULD RULE THE DAY.**

Sincerely and fraternally,

Randy