



Grand Chapter Royal Arch Masons in Virginia  
Grand Council Cryptic Masons in Virginia

# The Keystone

December 2025 Vol. 10 No. 1



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# The Virginia Keystone Newsletter - December 2025

## ***MOST EXCELLENT GRAND HIGH PRIEST/ MOST ILLUSTRIOUS GRAND MASTER'S MESSAGE***

### **Ho Companions!**

As the days grow shorter and the air turns crisp, we find ourselves once again embraced by the holiday season. It is a time for reflection, for gratitude, and most importantly, for cherishing the warmth of family and loved ones. In the quiet moments of this season, I hope you find peace and a renewed sense of hope. Just as the lights of the holidays dispel the winter darkness, may the light of Royal Arch Masonry burn brightly in your hearts and homes.

As we look toward the Capitular year ahead, I am filled with optimism for what we can achieve together. Our theme for the upcoming year is "Son of Man, Mark Well." Drawn from the vision of Ezekiel, this phrase serves as a powerful guide for our labors. The title "Son of Man" reminds us of our humanity; our humble nature and the limitations of our understanding compared to the Divine. It is a call to humility. Yet, the command to "Mark Well" challenges us to pay close attention to the details of the Great Architect's designs, to be accountable for our actions, and to leave a lasting, positive mark on the world.

This duality of humility and conscientious action is the foundation upon which we will build our future. We are not just maintaining an organization; we are stewarding a legacy. To that end, our goals for 2026 focus on establishing a firmer foundation to strengthen and grow our Royal Craft. We must embrace



Masonic Unity, particularly within the York Rite, and strengthen our ties with the Symbolic Lodge. We cannot stand apart; we must be visible, viable, and versatile.

The holiday season is naturally a time of giving, and service remains the heartbeat of our fraternity. As we enjoy the company of our families, let us not forget those who are struggling to remember their own. A central pillar of our work this year will be supporting the Alzheimer's Association, the MAHOVA Robert E. Brown Memory Support Unit, and Project Lifesaver. Whether through a donation, organizing a fundraiser, or the simple act of wearing one of the cancer ribbon pins I deployed this year, our philanthropic support is a tangible expression of our Masonic values.

We are reminded by the wisdom of Winston Churchill, who famously observed, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give" (Churchill, n.d.). It is through our giving, of our time, our resources, and our compassion, that we truly build a life of significance within the Craft.

Furthermore, let us consider the words of the theologian and physician Albert Schweitzer: "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve" (Schweitzer, n.d.). Let this pursuit of service be our joy as we strive to raise \$125,000 for our philanthropic causes this year. When we serve

our communities and support our Masonic Youth—DeMolay, Job’s Daughters, and Rainbow for Girls—we are truly marking well the ordinances of our faith and Craft.

However, I am acutely aware that for many, this season brings into sharp relief the absence of those we hold dear. The joy of the holidays can sometimes be shadowed by the memory of a lost loved one or the silence of an empty chair at the table. If you find yourself navigating the rough roads of grief or loneliness during this time, I implore you: do not walk alone. Turn to your Companions; lean on the strength of your Chapter and the solace of your faith. It is in these moments of vulnerability that the bonds of our Brotherhood are most vital. We are here to support one another, to offer a listening ear, and to remind each other that even in the darkest winter, we are never truly without light or guidance.

Companions, as we prepare to turn the calendar to a new year, let us commit to

Recruit, Retain, and Re-engage. Let us reach out to those Companions we haven't seen in a while, not just to collect dues, but to ensure they are well. Let us offer value to our members through education and fellowship, ensuring that every Companion who passes through the veils feels the profound weight and beauty of the Royal Arch.

May the Great Architect of the Universe bless you and your families this holiday season. May your homes be filled with laughter, your hearts with love, and your spirits with the hope of a bright new year. Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays!

**Son of Man, Mark Well.**

Sincerely and Fraternally,

Kyle W. Strickland

Grand High Priest

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Everyone you meet has struggles, even battles, they must fight each day.

**“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” —Ephesians 4:32**

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## A Solemn Farewell: Remembering Right Excellent Henry Patton Strickland



My Dear Companions,

It is with the deepest sorrow and profound regret that I must communicate the passing of our beloved Companion and my brother, **Right Excellent Henry Patton Strickland**, District Deputy Grand High Priest of the 21st Capitular District, who was called from his earthly labors to the Grand Chapter Above on Wednesday, December 3, 2025.

Right Excellent Strickland was not only a dedicated officer and an exemplary Mason, but a pillar of the Royal Arch in his District and a friend to all who knew him. His commitment to the Craft was unwavering, and he served with diligence, integrity, and a gentle spirit. As the District Deputy Grand High Priest of the 21st District, he was looking forward to bringing energy and vision to his role, tirelessly working to strengthen the Chapters under his care and uphold the true tenets of our Order. But as life is uncertain and earthly pursuits are vain, we are reminded that the approach of death can come when we least expect him and often during the meridian of our existence.

His service was a true reflection of the command we hold dear: to "Mark Well" the work entrusted to us, ensuring every stone laid was square, level, and plumb; good work, square work, just such work as is needed for the Temple.

The loss of a Companion leaves an empty space in our hearts and in our ranks, and the passing of a Brother so committed to the Craft is felt across the entire jurisdiction. In this time of sorrow, we

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extend our heartfelt condolences to his family, his loved ones, and his Companions in the 21st Capitular District and beyond. Though his physical presence is gone, the memory of his devotion and the impact of his labors will remain a guiding light for us all.

We know that grief, particularly during the holiday season, can be overwhelming. We turn now to the comforting words of the Holy Scriptures, and to the enduring promise of our faith, which reminds us that death is not the end, but a transition to a richer existence in the presence of the Great Architect of the Universe. It is in moments like these that the true value of the Royal Arch and our bonds shine brightest. Please reach out to one another. Lean on your Chapter for support, offer a hand to those who mourn, and find strength in the spiritual ties that bind us together as Companions.

Information regarding the memorial services and arrangements can be found here:

<https://www.briggsfh.com/obituaries/Henry-Patton-Strickland?obId=46559626> or through the office of the Grand Secretary.

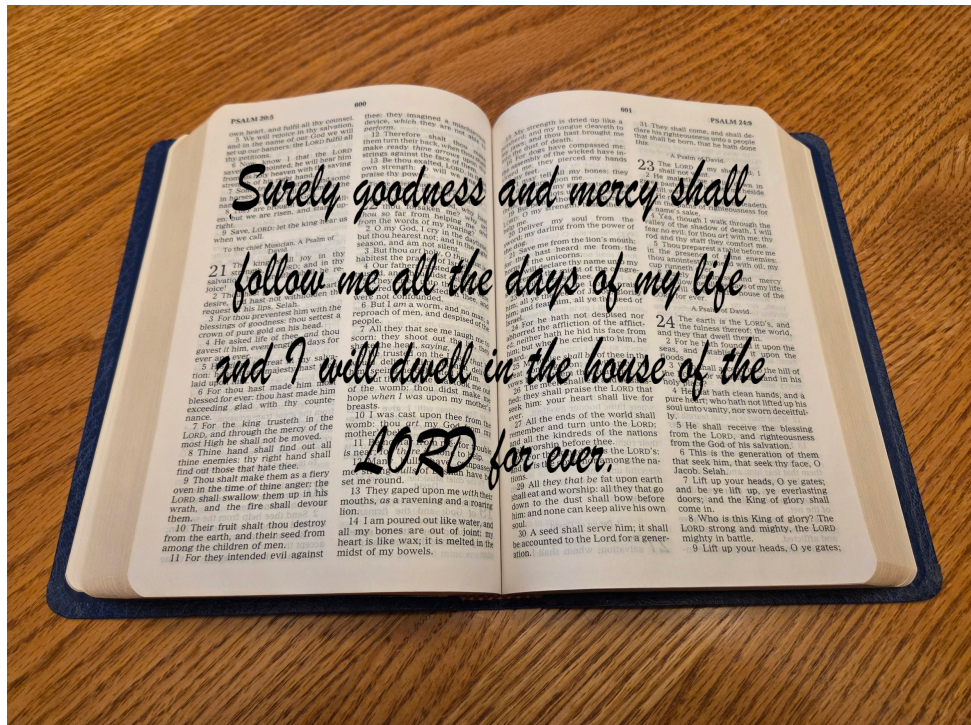
May the peace of the Great I Am rest upon the soul of our dearly departed Companion and may his family and all who mourn him find comfort and solace. He has laid down his working tools, and for his good and faithful service, he has surely received the wages due and can be counted as a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.

Sincerely and Fraternally,

Kyle W. Strickland

Grand High Priest

Grand Chapter Royal Arch Masons in Virginia



## Grand King's Message

### Ho Companions!

#### Three Good Things



“If the wound to girls is disempowerment, the wound to boys is disconnection- from their feelings, their needs, and from others.” *I Don't Want To Talk About It*. –Terrence Real  
“We suffer more in imagination than in reality.” “Letter 13”.  
–Seneca

Recently I finished reading an incredible book entitled *Outlive* (Attia), by Peter Attia, MD. I started it because I needed to understand more fully how to make substantive changes in my daily life to improve my health. It is a book about living longer, but also about living with better “healthspan”, or quality of life. In his book he references the Greek mythology of Tithonus who wanted eternal life. The gods granted this gift. Sadly, he forgot to ask for eternal youth and his body continued to wither and decay.

Page after page of all the things we should do to prevent what Dr. Attia calls the four horsemen, chronic diseases that cause a significant portion of deaths, not only here in the USA, but worldwide: cardiovascular disease, cancer, neurodegenerative disease and metabolic disease. My personal and family history overlaps with all of these. As dad died from Parkinsons and mom from Alzheimer's, the neurodegenerative disease section piqued my interest.

It turned out that the final chapter was the most powerful, as he described his own journey through emotional turmoil and

depression. He references another incredible work, *I Don't Want To Talk About It* (Real), by Terrence Real. Real writes that women often have obvious symptoms of depression, while with men, they tend to be covert (Real, ch. 3).  
“Men are socialized to conceal their depression, channeling it

inward or into other emotions, such as anger, without ever wanting to discuss it (Attia 390).”

Mental health is much larger than depression as we typically think of it. As a physician I have often seen my male patients with significant loneliness. We now describe this as a “Loneliness Epidemic” (Murthy) from social isolation, especially after the loss of a spouse. During this time of year a significant number of adults experience a type of temporary depression, often called “holiday blues” given that same type of social isolation over the holidays. Sometimes it is from Seasonal Affective Disorder and the decrease in sunlight and manifesting as winter-pattern depression. We also know many masons who experience masonic burn-out (Homan). It is easy to pile too much on our masonic plates, which takes away from our time needed for refreshment and sleep.

When men think of mental health, it is often about other obvious mental problems: dementia, psychosis, mania, etc. It becomes easy to say, that isn't something I have to worry about, even if we are being dismissive with our own needs. In addition to better

self-reflection on our mental health, we need a much broader reach that includes our emotional health. Are we able to manage our stress, or are we having problems with sleep or addiction, struggle with our interpersonal relationships, have exhaustion and poor work performance (DerSarkissian)?

Why write about this in the December Keystone? Over the past year I have traveled around Virginia as the President of the Medical Society of Virginia speaking to physicians, PAs, nurses and other clinicians about mental health and burnout. It is a problem, not just in healthcare, but everywhere. Mental and emotional issues often worsen during this time of year.

So what are we to do? Obviously if you or someone you know is struggling with their mental health, you can call or text the Crisis and Suicide Lifeline at 988.

What else can we do? As masons, we need to make sure we are reaching out to our brothers, especially those who are “shut-ins” and unable to get to lodge or chapter anymore. Pick up the phone, go by their residence, just be there and add to their social interaction. The Surgeon General’s report has lots of ideas. Here are some I felt to be incredibly impactful (Murthy 66) with my own emphasis underlined:

- “Invest time in nurturing your relationships through consistent, frequent, and high-quality engagement with others. Take time each day to reach out to a friend or family member.
- Minimize distraction during conversation to increase the quality of the time you spend with others. For instance, don’t check your phone during meals with friends, important conversations, and family time.

- Be responsive, supportive, and practice gratitude. As we practice these behaviors, others are more likely to reciprocate, strengthening our social bonds, improving relationship satisfaction, and building social capital.”

Speaking of gratitude, let me end with another tool that is incredibly valuable and comes from the field of positive psychology. I’ve heard Dr. Bryan Sexton speak of the tool Three Good Things on several occasions. This tool was used in healthcare workers who experienced burnout and appeared to improve the following metrics: emotional exhaustion, depression, subjective happiness, work-life balance, emotional thriving, and emotional recovery (Adair et al. 1). These improvements were found to last up to 12 months. It was interesting that negative measures such as depression improved to a greater degree than positive measures such as subjective happiness (Adair et al. 7).

This seems like an incredible tool. Is it expensive? No. Is it easy? Yes. If appropriate, how to do it? First, every night before bed, open a journal, or on a piece of paper, and write down “what went well today, and what was your role in making it happen?” for three separate events. These events are often small and could be, “I heard the voice of my grandchild on the phone.” or “I had a nice walk outside.” Next, write down the emotion that best fits how you felt about the good thing. Examples given include joy, gratitude and hope. Finally, do this every night for 15 days (Sexton and Adair 3–5). Over the past year I have shared this simple tool to a myriad of medical students and physicians.

- In the end, these are two simple things that have been espoused to improve mental health for others, and for us. I recognize this is a difficult subject, and

one we often don't want to confront, but I believe this is a cresting tidal wave across our country, especially for those of us as we become older. I often reflect on the final charge in Blue Lodge, as we are reminded to relieve every brother who needs our assistance. Remember, that includes ourselves. Let's get to it.

The information provided is for general knowledge and informational purposes only and does not constitute medical advice. The information provided here is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

Sincerely and Fraternally,

Rt. Ex. Joel T. Bundy, MD

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## Grand Scribe's Message

### Ho Companions!

When I was a young Royal Arch Mason in 1986, I attended Grand Chapter in Fredericksburg. The Grand High Priest that year was Most Excellent Stewart Wilson Minor, whose theme was "Let Your Work Become Your Mark". During that year, he issued a book with the same name which I consider to be the best work ever on the teachings of the Mark Master Degree. In each Chapter, he discusses some part of the Mark Master ritual and its relevance to today's Royal Arch Mason. The first Chapter is entitled "Follow Me", which I have chosen for this message. Why do we have Grand Officers? I have always thought the answer to be that Grand Officers exist to help and strengthen Chapters and to promote Royal Arch Masonry. To serve as an elected Grand Chapter Officer is a high honor indeed, not because of the accolades or prestige we receive, but because of the trust the Companions have placed in us. To that extent, I have always considered these offices as a working job; not just to show up occasionally at a Grand Official Visit, but instead to travel extensively throughout Virginia year after year to assist Chapters and build strong relationships with their members.



When we are elected Grand Master of the First Veil, we are assigned as the Area Representative for several Royal Arch Districts. Each year as we progress, we are assigned a new Area. The assumption is that we will visit and help those Chapters each year, and over time, we will get to know everyone and visit all Chapters. During those years, we learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the Chapters, as well as learn to follow the plans and directives of the Grand High Priest. Oftentimes I am asked what it takes to become a Grand Officer, and my answer is always this: Constantly improve in knowledge and ability. Learn everything you can about our ritual, history, activities, and traditions, and thus be ready to take on any position or task that Masonry asks of you. You never know when a position will become available for which you have the skills and ability to assume it and be successful. I encourage you to follow this philosophy, not only to improve your Masonic abilities, but to assist the Grand High Priest and his officers in making this a successful Capitular Year!

Rt. Ex. Thomas L. Varner  
Grand Scribe

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## GRAND PROVOST AND/OR COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND SERVICE MESSAGE

### LEADERSHIP CORRESPONDENCE COURSE COMPLETIONS

The following Companions have recently completed correspondence courses. The Committee on Education and Service applauds your efforts and your successful completion

**No Completions Reported At This Time**

My Dear Companions,

I trust this finds you and yours safe and well. It is with honor and pleasure that I serve as your Grand Provost and Chairman of the Grand Chapter and Grand Council Committee on Education and Service this Capitular and Cryptic Year. Our Most Excellent Grand High Priest/Most Illustrious Grand Master Kyle W. Strickland has provided his plan and we are busy at work!

I invite you to reach out to me with your thoughts and ideas. It is together, invested, will we strengthen our Chapters and Councils. I remind you that the Subordinate Chapter and Council Officer Training Manual, which provides many needed and useful tools, can be found on our website under the “Forms and Information” page (further under Miscellaneous <https://virginiaroyalarch.org/forms/>) as well as on the Education page (in the block at the bottom below the Educational Programs and Materials): <https://virginiaroyalarch.org/education/>.

We continue working to increase the listing of resource materials on the website: <https://virginiaroyalarch.org/education/>. Many of the programs have been used by Companions both in and out of this Grand Jurisdiction to provide light in their Chapters and Councils. Please do reach me with programs you have developed or are aware of or links to sites that you feel would be a good resource to share.

Our online Correspondence Course has been very successful! Companions are taking advantage of the opportunity to take the course individually or as a group and complete it at their leisure, wherever they may choose to do so, as long as they have an internet connection. The course itself is updated each time we update our constitution at our Grand Annual Convocations, so there is always something new to learn; the course registration form and lessons are located at <https://virginiaroyalarch.org/education/>.

Your Committee on Education and Service continues to strive to bring you news and helpful information via The Keystone Newsletter publication. It always makes for a better publication when Companions provide input to allow us to share what is going on in the rest of the jurisdiction or in Capitular and Cryptic Masonry in general and to increase our store of Masonic knowledge.

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We encourage you to provide input as often as possible. Please submit entries to [thevakeystone@gmail.com](mailto:thevakeystone@gmail.com).

The Grand Chapter & Grand Council Committee on Education and Service continues to provide opportunities for our collective improvement and enlightenment, through virtual educational presentations. We hope you will join us! Sessions will be held on the Zoom platform on the following dates and times:

- 28 March 2026 from 10:00 to 11:00 am ET
- 27 June 2026 from 10:00 to 11:00 am ET
- 26 September 2026 from 10:00 to 11:00 am ET

Join the Zoom Meetings at:

<https://us05web.zoom.us/j/86916917819?pwd=W6KTDLX8xc26oCb3U5kfyvUbswkG7l.1>

Meeting ID: 869 1691 7819

Passcode: 9HT1kD

Please remember to reach me at any time with questions, concerns, or ways to improve.

Sincerely and fraternally yours in friendship and service,

Raymon W. Bacchus  
Grand Provost

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## Be Proactive

Habit 1: “Be Proactive” is about taking responsibility for your life. Proactive people recognize that they are “response-able.” They don’t blame circumstances, conditions, or conditioning for their behavior. They know they can choose their behavior. Reactive people, on the other hand, are often affected by their physical environment. They find external sources to blame for their behavior.

FranklinCovey, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People

## CHAPTER / COUNCIL NEWS

### District 15

#### Alzheimer's Walk Roanoke VA

It was a crisp 45 degree morning in the predawn hours in the Roanoke Valley as companions of District 8 started to assemble. Everyone was waiting on the 60+ degree warmth the local meteorologists promised. Team captain, Right Excellent Joey Martin, had requested those who could help with setting up of the walk facilities to assemble at Wasena park at 7AM. As in years past, district 8 did not disappoint. Nikki Austin-Hicks has always appreciated our help in this area as the Walk to End Alzheimer's organizer.

As the sun ascended above the mountain tops, the team got to work. Companions from the chapters aided in setting up tents, putting together signs, and any other duties that were needed. In addition to the event setup, some companions were helping with individual walk teams in their areas. There were even companions assisting with traffic and parking.

Prior to the event getting started, District 8 was able to walk around and meet the other participants in the Alzheimer's walk that morning. As a team, we made great acquaintances, and talked to several organizations about Masonry in general. We even had a couple of the local sponsors and youth organizations inquire about possibly doing presentations in our Chapters and Lodges. Royal Arch Masonry was in full force that morning.

Roanoke's walk to end Alzheimer's kicked off that morning with a DJ and some music playing from the stage. A call was placed over the PA for any presentations at this time. Excellent Companion Jerry Martin proudly walked onto the stage, accompanied by Companion Jim Griffen, where he presented a fundraiser check for over a thousand dollars. Excellent Companion Jerry, as in years past, has organized and executed a pancake breakfast held at DC Shanks #31 earlier this year. This donation has enabled Excellent Companion Jerry to enter into the distinguished Champions Club of the Alzheimer's Association.

Nikki Austin-Hicks had several guest speakers that morning including a fabulous explanation of the colors of the flower. As the participants were able to pick from the flowers available from the promise guardian, brave individuals took the stage. The first person held a blue flower as a symbol of someone who is living with Alzheimer's. Many of the onlookers held their flowers high in the air for this explanation. The next flower presented was explained as people who have lost loved ones to this debilitating disease.

Unfortunately, a great many purple flowers were raised in the air for this explanation. Among those holding them high were Excellent Companion Jerry Martin and myself. We lost our mother

July from this ailment. Many misty eyes were in the crowd for this moment of solidarity. Another flower took the stage to explain the meaning of the caregivers and supporters. As the yellow flowers were hoisted in the air, a round of applause came in support for those individuals whose time and patience abound for this cause. Several orange flowers were raised as the explanation talked about those who support the cause. The last person who took the stage, was for the hope of one day, that someone would be able to proudly wave the white flower as someone who has been cured from this life altering disease. The speaker was then able to go into the amazing medical advancements that have been made. There are many medicines in trials that are showing phenomenal successes. A couple in stage two of testing that may show signs of regression and stoppages. There is anxious hope on the pharmaceutical side that the organization may be finding possible cures.

The call was then made to assemble at the starting line for this easy 1 mile walk along the Roanoke River in Wasena Park. Several Companions were able to participate in this relaxing walk along the river. After the walk began, many District 8 Royal Arch Companions, at the request of the organizers, assisted in the load out of the event. The Companions were able to take down the event tents, signs, tables and various other displays. Royal Arch Masonry was on proud display the morning of October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025. As team captain I would like to recognize the following Companions for diligent work in promoting our craft and many of the Alzheimer's events. Thank you to Excellent Companion Jerry Martin, Companions Jim Griffen, Shane Wilson and his wife Kelley, and Johnson and his

Kevin  
wife Carrie.



Left to Right: Companion Jim Griffen and Excellent Companion Jerry Martin present donations

Right Excellent Joey S Martin

## District 15

The 2025 Walk to End Alzheimer's - Northern Shenandoah Valley yearly event was held on Saturday, November 1, 2025, in Winchester, Virginia. There were approximately 334 participants. Total donations raised \$49,320. The Grand Chapter Royal Arch Masons in Virginia proudly supports the Alzheimer's cause through various fundraising activities, from District 15 Chapters, including walk contributions. The Masons also contribute to other Alzheimer's related initiatives, such as the Alzheimer's Association research efforts, and the Masonic Home of Virginia's Memory Unit. The fight against Alzheimer's, now matters more than ever. Give what you can, when you can to help end Alzheimer's.

L to R: Rt. Ex. Les Flowers, (DDGHP District 15), Ex. Harold Chadsey (MEHP of John Dove RAC No. 21), and Rt. Ex. Alan Spear, (MEHP of Shenandoah RAC No. 17).



## Waynesboro Union No. 2

On October 4, the 2025 Greater Augusta Walk to End Alzheimer's raised \$77,683 towards its \$80,000 goal. Waynesboro Union No. 2 donated \$1530, earning 4th place among all companies competing in this Walk and earning the title of "Grand Champion". Hundreds joined in the pre-Walk ceremony and the Walk.

Our Degree Team continues to be active with conferral of the following degrees:

Mark Master and Past Master for two candidates on September 16, and Select and Royal Master and Most Excellent Master for two candidates on October 21, and Royal Arch degree for two candidates on November 11.

We also assisted Lee Lodge in hosting a Provisional Lodge of Past Masters for multiple candidates on November 18 in support of the 19th Masonic District and adjoining Masonic Districts.



Waynesboro Union No. 2 Degree Team and visitors welcome newly exalted Royal Arch Masons (left to right) William Overstreet (Waynesboro Union No. 2 ) and Jason Butcher (Keystone No. 58)

## **Petersburg Union No. 7**

Petersburg Union Royal Arch Chapter No. 7 conferred the Royal Arch degree on Nov. 5 with six candidates, including two from Peter Francisco RAC UD and four from No. 7.



Front Row: Eddie Whitt, Mike Montgomery, Charles Templeton, Christopher Tripp, Robert Kern, Chip Sharkey, Ed Oleyar, John Lundin, Perry Dark, William Erner, Donnie Parr, Michael Wilhelm, Stephan Kitchen, Bob Ferguson

Back Row: Russel Snodgrass, Robin Sowers, Bill Coyner, Henry Sharber, Clifton White

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## Shenandoah No. 17

By request of three area Blue Lodges, Shenandoah RAC conferred the Provisional Past Master Degree.

Candidates:	Jeremiah Danter	Spurmont Lodge # 98
	Kenneth B. M'Ghee	Washington Lodge # 78
	Mark Dinsmore	Spurmont Lodge # 98 (Exemplar)



The evening was capped off with all you can eat Spiced Shrimp prepared by Ex. Companion Butch Ross.



**Future Event:** Capitular District No.15 will host a Table Chapter later in the Year (Late Summer or early Fall). The District's Blue Lodge Ambassador will be contacting the various Worshipful Masters and inviting them and their Ladies to attend to show off our Philanthropic Fund Raiser for Alzheimer's and MOHVA Memory Unit primary fund-raising event of the year. Our MC for the day will be Rt. Ex. Companion Dennis Haas.

Pictures taken by: Ex. Companion John Petrie MEHP No. 45  
Article Submitted by RT. Ex. Alan K. Spear MEHP No. 17

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## **GUEST CONTRIBUTORS**

Marcellus de Rochon de Lap rouse  
Norfolk United Royal Arch Chapter No. 1

### **The Lost Word Found -**

#### **Discovering the Sacred Name Within**

In the depths of Solomon's Temple, buried beneath rubble and concealed by time, lay the Sacred Vault containing treasures beyond earthly measure. Among these treasures, none surpassed in importance the Sacred Name—that Lost Word whose recovery completes the Master Mason's journey and fulfills the ancient promise that "what was lost shall be found."

Yet as we progress through our Capitular degrees, a profound truth emerges: the Word we seek is not truly lost, but rather veiled by our own limited understanding. Like archaeologists of the spirit, we do not discover something entirely foreign, but uncover what was always present, waiting for eyes prepared to see and hearts ready to receive.

The journey to the Sacred Name begins long before we descend into the vault. It commences with that first knocking at the Lodge door, continues through each degree where we pledge ourselves to higher ideals, and finds its fulfillment not in the mere pronunciation of syllables, but in the lived experience of divine unity that the Name represents.

Consider the profound symbolism embedded in this recovery. The Word was not destroyed by the cataclysm that befell the Temple, but preserved by faithful guardians who understood its true value. Similarly, the divine spark within each human soul—that aspect of our nature that yearns for connection with the Great Architect—cannot be destroyed by life's inevitable trials. It may be buried beneath layers of disappointment, concealed by walls of cynicism, or obscured by the debris of broken dreams, but it endures, waiting for the moment of rediscovery.

The Sacred Name, when finally revealed, proves to be not a single word but a harmony of divine attributes. In its composite nature, we discover a profound truth about both divinity and humanity: that wholeness emerges not from simplicity but from the perfect integration of complementary qualities. Just as the Name unites multiple aspects of the divine nature, our own spiritual development requires the integration of various virtues into a harmonious whole.

This integration cannot be achieved through intellectual effort alone. The path to the Sacred Name leads through the heart as much as the mind, through experience as much as study, through service as much as ceremony. The Companion who seeks the Lost Word only in books will find syllables; the one who seeks it in his relationships with others will discover meaning; the one who seeks it in service to something greater than himself will find transformation.

The trials that precede the recovery of the Sacred Name teach us that spiritual treasure cannot be cheaply won. Each challenge in our Masonic journey—from the physical and moral qualifications required for initiation to the tests of character demanded by advancement—prepares us to receive

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what would otherwise overwhelm or corrupt us. Like muscles that grow stronger under resistance, our spiritual capacity expands through meeting difficulties with integrity and perseverance.

In our daily lives, this principle manifests in countless ways. The business leader who maintains ethical standards despite competitive pressure builds capacity to handle greater responsibilities. The parent who responds to adolescent rebellion with patient firmness rather than anger develops wisdom that will serve through decades of relationship. The friend who remains loyal through another's struggles creates bonds that endure beyond temporary difficulties.

Each such test, successfully met, removes another layer of debris from our personal vault, bringing us closer to that moment of recognition when we discover that what we have been seeking has been within us all along.

The Sacred Name also teaches us about the nature of divine communication. Throughout human history, people have sought to capture the infinite in finite words, to contain the eternal in temporal concepts. The multiplicity of religions, philosophies, and spiritual traditions testifies to this universal human quest. Yet the Royal Arch degree suggests that the Sacred Name transcends any single tradition while being accessible through sincere seeking in any authentic path.

This recognition should inspire both humility and tolerance in our interactions with others. The Christian who discovers God in service to the poor, the Jew who finds the Divine through study and observance, the Muslim who encounters Allah in prayer and charity, the Buddhist who realizes enlightenment through compassion and wisdom—all are excavating the same Sacred Vault, though they may use different tools and follow different paths.

The Royal Arch Mason, having discovered the composite nature of the Sacred Name, can appreciate the validity of various approaches to spiritual truth while remaining faithful to his own path. He becomes a bridge between traditions rather than a wall between them, recognizing that the Light he has received in Masonry illuminates rather than contradicts the light available through other sincere seeking.

Perhaps most importantly, the recovery of the Lost Word teaches us that spiritual achievement is not a destination but a doorway. The moment of discovery in the Sacred Vault does not end our journey but begins a new phase of responsibility. Having received the Sacred Name, we become its guardians for future generations, charged with preserving not just its syllables but its meaning, not just its pronunciation but its power to transform lives.

This guardianship expresses itself in how we live rather than merely in what we say. The Companion who has truly found the Lost Word within himself becomes a living expression of its meaning. His actions speak more eloquently than any words of the divine qualities the Sacred Name represents. His character becomes a testament to the reality of spiritual transformation, proof that ancient promises can find fulfillment in modern lives.

The workplace colleague who consistently demonstrates integrity under pressure, the neighbor who offers help without being asked, the citizen who stands for justice even when it costs him

personally—these may never speak of Sacred Names or Masonic mysteries, yet they bear witness to spiritual truths more convincingly than any ceremonial pronouncement.

As we contemplate the profound symbolism of the Lost Word found, let us remember that each day offers opportunities to excavate our own Sacred Vault. Every moment of choosing principle over convenience removes debris. Every act of service to others clears away obstruction. Every instance of placing collective good above personal gain brings us closer to that chamber where eternal treasures wait.

The Sacred Name we seek is simultaneously the goal of our quest and the power that enables our seeking. It is both the question and the answer, the journey and the destination, the seeker and the sought. In discovering it, we discover our own divine nature. In pronouncing it with understanding, we proclaim our kinship with the Great Architect. In living it through our daily choices, we participate in the ongoing creation of a more perfect world.

May each of us prove worthy guardians of the Sacred Name, faithful excavators of our own spiritual treasures, and living witnesses to the truth that what was lost can indeed be found by those who seek with sincere hearts and willing hands.

So mote it be.

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## **The Northeast Corner**

There was a legend among Operative Masons that Solomon laid the cornerstone at the Northeast Corner early in the morning, because at that time the light was in the Northeast Corner. He moved from there with the rays of the sun to the Southeast Corner as the sun rose toward its zenith; to the Southwest Corner as the sun started its downward parade toward the west, reaching the Northwest Corner early in the afternoon, thus having the greatest light at all times at the portion of the Temple where he labored. Taking this legend as the basis, the Northeast Corner represents the dawn of light into the soul. It is a symbol of youth emerging from the darkness of ignorance into the light of knowledge.

We, as Freemasons, look toward the East, whence comes the light of spiritual wisdom, and, so long as we imitate Solomon in his erection of the physical building, and travel with the symbolic light in our labors, the security and perpetuity of our great Institution are assured.

Elbert Bede, “5-15 Minute Talks”, The Northeast Corner, page 8

# The Virginia Keystone Newsletter - December 2025

Ed Tooma, PHP  
District 15

## Stop Whispering:

Why is it that whenever Masons meet outside of the Lodge, they tend to whisper when talking about the Fraternity they proudly belong to? We're not in a bygone era when no one spoke about Masonry at all. We're in the 21st century, where things have changed. Be proud of who you are and what you are. Not many can say they belong to the world's oldest and largest fraternity. Masonry has a lot in common with the United States Marine Corps. We are the few - We are the proud. Always remember that. Our late brother and actor, Ernest Borgnine, was a Grand Cross. He was raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason in Abingdon Lodge No. 48 in Virginia, and he never demitted. Brother Ernie said, when talking about our fraternity, no matter where you are, speak up. The only time you don't speak up is when discussing our ways of recognition, etc. That's private, and only for members. And don't hesitate to greet a brother you meet in a public place. Greet him in the same manner you would in a lodge. There is nothing wrong with addressing him as brother. After all, he is your fraternal brother. The manner in which we conduct ourselves away from the Lodge can be very impressive upon others, and it is a good way for a profane to inquire, especially when he hears the name Mason mentioned. By speaking up, it could very well lead to someone asking one to be one. Brothers, who are reading this article, should bring this matter up at the next stated, so we can all stop our whispering. If this doesn't deserve an Amen, nothing else will. So Be It!

(Written By Masonic Veteran, Bro. Ed Tooma)

