



Grand Chapter Royal Arch Masons in Virginia

Grand Council Cryptic Masons in Virginia

The Keystone

February 2026 Vol. 10 No. 2

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A publication of the Grand Chapter
and Grand Council in Virginia
P.O. Box 2276
Portsmouth, Virginia 23702

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MOST EXCELLENT GRAND HIGH PRIEST/ MOST ILLUSTRIOS GRAND MASTER'S MESSAGE

Ho, Companions!

Marking Our Work: A Message of Growth

Companions,

As we navigate through this Capitular year, my heart is filled with gratitude for the zeal and constancy you have shown in our Chapters across this Grand Jurisdiction. From the shores of Tidewater to the heights of the Blue Ridge, the "Red Coat" is becoming a more visible symbol of Masonic completion and excellence.

Our theme this year remains the divine charge from the Book of Ezekiel: **"Son of Man, Mark Well."** In our ritual, this is a command to observe the quality of the work. In our leadership, it is a call to intentionality. In our daily lives it is a request for compassion and understanding. It implies a need for introspection and a keen understanding of our own "Mark" in the grand design of Masonry. As the great orator Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, *"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail."* We are the trailblazers of the Chapter; we must ensure the trail we leave is one of excellence. We must Mark Well not only the stones we hew but the legacy we build.



As your Grand High Priest, I want to challenge every Companion to employ these concepts every day and in the words of Most Excellent Stewart Wilson Miner, "Let Your Work Become your Mark." As we look to strengthen and grow Capitular Masonry let us look at the Craft through the lens of three critical "V's": **Visibility, Viability, and Versatility.**

Stepping Out of the Shadows

In recent history, the Royal Arch has been dismissed as a "hidden" part of the Craft. Let us strengthen our ties with the symbolic Lodge and restore the connection to Capitular Masonry from bygone eras. Invisibility is the greatest threat to our future. We must be visible, not for the sake of vanity or self-preservation, but for the sake of the Master Mason who is still searching for the "True Word," further improvement, and more light in Masonry. If we do not showcase our light, how can we expect our Brethren in the Blue Lodge to seek it?

Stepping out of the shadows means being the "face of unity" in your Lodges. It means wearing the Red Coat with a pride that invites questions rather than guarding a secret that prevents growth. As Albert Einstein wisely noted, *"The value of a man should be seen in what he gives and not in what he is able to*

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receive." We must give our presence, our energy, and our visibility back to the Blue Lodges. We must be the light that cannot be ignored.

Ensuring Our Viability

Viability is our internal strength. It is the measure of whether our Chapters are merely surviving or truly thriving. A viable Chapter is one where the ritual is delivered with dignity and purpose, where the fellowship is genuine, and where every Companion feels he has a "Mark" or a purpose in the work. We must move away from the "business-only" meetings and return to being centers of Masonic education and a transformative experience.

Celebrating Our Versatility

The genius of the Royal Arch is its versatility. Whether a Brother is a historian, a ritualist, a philosopher, or a social butterfly, our degrees offer him a home. We must communicate this to the Craft. The Royal Arch is not a narrow path; it is a broad highway that completes the story of Ancient Craft Masonry. We must adapt our outreach to show every Master Mason that the Royal Arch is the Keystone that completes his symbolic and spiritual journey.

The T.E.A.M.S. Approach to Growth

Our path forward is paved by the three gears of our membership approach: **Recruitment, Retention, and Re-engagement.**

- **Recruitment** is our invitation to completion. Every Companion should be a "Recruiter of One," identifying that zealous Master Mason in his Lodge and showing him that his journey is half-told until he finds that which was lost.
- **Retention** is our covenant. We must be equal to the task of not only recruiting but by ensuring Companions are retained. We do this by valuing every man's "Mark" and giving him a role, not just a seat.
- **Re-engagement** is an act of brotherly love. Behind every vacant Companion, suspension or demit is a Companion who may simply be waiting for a hand on the shoulder. I charge you to stretch forth your hand and reach out to those who have drifted away and invite them back to the full light of the Arch.

Remember our membership mantra:

T.E.A.M.S. – *Together Effectively Achieving Membership Strength.*

Companions, titles are temporary, but our principles are eternal. Let us continue to labor in harmony, ensuring that when the world, and our Brethren, look upon our work, they find "good work, square work, just such work as is needed for the Temple"

Let us no longer postpone the great and important undertaking of rebuilding the Temple. As detailed in Executive Order No.

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5, this year, on June 13th, we will hold a State-wide Royal Arch Festival. Let us apply our working tools to cultivate and harvest new Companions. Use this as an opportunity to bring more Brethren to the Light of the Royal Arch. Our Grand Lecturer, Committee on Work, and many other Companions are well underway planning this special event. Let their work not be in vain, let us rise to the occasion and make this an event to remember!

May the Supreme Grand High Priest bless your labors and may all your good intentions be crowned with success.

Son of Man, Mark Well,

Kyle W. Strickland
Grand High Priest

An Ode for Opening

John Bacchus Dykes, 1862

Hail! Eternal! by whose aid
All created things were made;
Heaven and earth Thy vast design;
Hear us, Architect Divine!

May our work begun in Thee,
Ever blest with order be;
And may we when labours cease,
Part in harmony and peace.

By Thy Glorious Majesty -
by the trust we place in Thee -
By the badge and mystic sign -
Hear us! Architect Divine!

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Grand King's Message

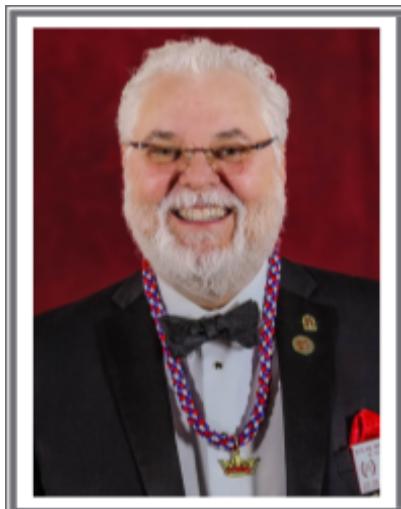
Ho, Companions!

Happiness is the Way, Part 1

*Happiness held is the seed;
happiness shared is the flower.*
John Harrigan

I'm sure I'm not the only one who feels this way, but it seems as if civility is a quaint word from yesteryear and in much need of resurrecting today. Many of us look for inner peace and equanimity. As Royal Arch Masons, we know we should live in harmony...but...what if it is for the person across the dinner table, in our group of friends or within our place of worship? Even within our Chapters there can be disharmony. Too often we are working towards happiness within ourselves and our relationships. Some have opined that "There is no way to happiness, happiness is the way." (Hạnh) It shouldn't be a future goal, but inherent in the path we choose to live in the here and now.

According to a study published in 2012, people are happier when they slow down, appreciate the people they love, the meaningful things in their lives, and feel gratitude towards others. The author writes, "The challenge in fostering appreciation is that we want to periodically reflect on the positive aspects of our lives, value our friends and family, relish and savor the good times (Fagley)."



But what about our relationships with others? How to foster peace and joy, especially with so much angst in the world? Among the many tools available, three very specific evidenced-based tools come to mind and are readily available to us:

- Random acts of kindness
- The 5:1 ratio
- SBI feedback tool

We have heard about random acts of kindness, and all of us have shown these small gestures to others. What is clear is that it is more important than we realize (Pearson). Researchers looked at small acts of kindness and studied the impact on others. One such study had eight different variations, and in each of them the person receiving the kindness was impacted much more than the giver would have imagined. One of the authors stated that "people tend to think that what they are giving is kind of little, maybe it's relatively inconsequential. But recipients are less likely to think along those lines. They consider the gesture to be significantly more meaningful because they are also thinking about the fact that someone did something nice for them (Kumar and Epley)." It is both the gift received and the giver's actions that impact others in a positive way.

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Have you heard about the 5:1 ratio? This is the second tool for your toolbox. In 1992, Drs. Gottman and Levenson studied couples (Gottman and Levenson). These couples were asked to work through an area of conflict. They were filmed and had follow-up over the next decade. How the couple worked through the conflict predicted with 90% accuracy whether the couple would remain married or seek divorce. What predicted this? It was the ratio of positive to negative interactions during conflict. The sweet spot appeared to be ~ 5:1, positive to negative. Potent negative interactions included criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. This tool is powerful outside of our intimate relationships and can help us navigate through life.

You may ask, well then, how do I share those emotions with my lodgebrother, boss, or spouse, things that have stirred a viscerally negative reaction within? This brings us to the third tool, Situation-Behavior-Impact, or SBI (Weitzel). How would you like to have someone tell you that you are a terrible person, someone who doesn't care, is lazy, and on and on? That is how others feel when we do the same to them. Most people get defensive and often lash out or quiet down, which leads to further negative interactions.

What if we were able to separate the behavior from the person's inner self? We can use the Situation-Behavior-Impact method. This allows us to better understand intention and then the person across from us to understand the impact of those actions. It goes like this:

1. After the negative behavior, find a place where the two of you can quietly talk.
2. Describe the situation in which the behavior occurred.
3. Describe the behavior.
4. Describe the impact of that behavior.
5. Try to then learn more about intent, which allows two-way conversation to follow.

Using this model can allow clear feedback, and when done well, removes the personal anxiety most feel when receiving good counsel. As Masons, we are taught to give such good counsel but not shown how to do so. This is such a tool.

How can we use these within our Chapters? In Virginia Masonry? As a man in this troubled world trying to fight the good fight? Our tenets within this gentle craft are to help others who are suffering and in need. If we take time to be present in the moment, we are also more likely to be happier, especially when we are appreciative and grateful for what is there right in front of us. We would adhere to the Senior Warden who admonishes us to care for our distressed brothers, our widows and orphans. Let us start with those small acts of kindness, build on this by making our relationships more positive, and give that good counsel in a way that it will be better received. A very wise man taught that "there is no path to happiness; happiness is the path." If so, let's walk down this path together, brother to brother, friend to friend...

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This topic is so important that I plan on writing a short series on happiness. This first one shares a few tools you can use *today* in your relationships. In the future you will read more on what happiness really is (as contrasted with the emotion of *feeling* happy),

what truly is important (eulogy virtues), and the three “macronutrients” of happiness.

Sincerely and Fraternally,
Joel T. Bundy, MD
Grand King

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If you keep saying that things are going to be bad, you have a chance of being a prophet.

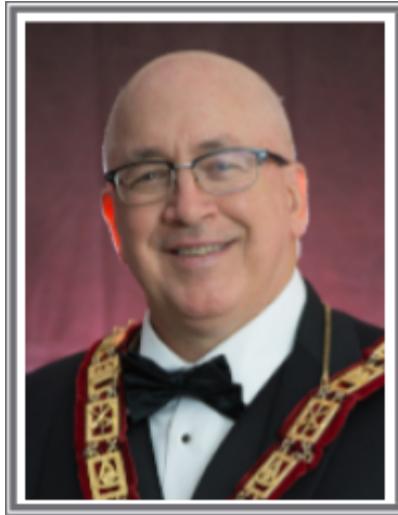
Thou are snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth
Proverbs 6:2

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Grand Scribe's Message

Ho, Companions!

As a former Grand Provost, I encourage all of you to take advantage of the educational opportunities on our Grand Chapter website. Are you aware we have dozens of articles on Royal Arch history, ritual, and symbolism, as well as of general interest? If that is not enough, are you aware we have links to other Grand Chapters that have many other interesting articles? Are you aware that John Dove's original 1853 Royal Arch textbook is available to you on the website? It contains extremely valuable information on the history of Capitular Masonry and how the degrees were developed. Finally, are you aware that the Correspondence Course is available online as well as in pdf form? If you want to increase in knowledge, skills, and ability, this is a good place to start. The more you know, the more you extend your knowledge to others, the more you put what you have learned in practice, the more valuable you will be to your Chapter and District. Every few months I receive reports from the District Deputy Grand High Priests on each Chapter



and read them very carefully. They do show that Chapters are providing educational programs at meetings. However, too often, they show that no one took the Correspondence Course during that period. I think the Course is a vital tool for our Chapter Officers and we should utilize it more. I encourage you to make each meeting a valuable experience for the attendees, not only to provide a good meal and enjoyable fellowship, but also to give them a broader understanding of the Royal Arch. I encourage you to plan your meetings so that they provide value to our members and make them glad they left their homes to attend. I think our goal should be to have each member say, "I'm glad I came to my Chapter tonight, I learned something new, and I look forward to the next meeting." With that in mind, please make dispensing knowledge and truth through our educational system an important goal!

Sincerely and Fraternally,
Thomas L. Varner
Grand Scribe

Faith is daring the soul to go beyond what the eyes can see.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.
Hebrews 11:1

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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

Andrew Hampton, September 15, 2025

An Interpretation - The Cherubim and the Ark: Guardianship of Divine Truth in the Royal Master Degree – By Companion Raymon W. Bacchus

Within the Royal Master Degree, the image of the Cherubim spreading their wings over the Ark of the Covenant is rich with layered symbolism. Far from being a mere historical reference, this image conveys a profound spiritual truth with relevance not only to the Mason but to every human being engaged in the search for meaning, purpose, and moral clarity.

In Judeo-Christian tradition, the Cherubim are celestial beings charged with guarding that which is sacred. Scripture places them at the threshold of holy spaces, protectors of Eden, attendants of the Divine Presence, and guardians of the Ark itself. In this sense, the Cherubim represent far more than angels with wings; they embody the principle of guardianship. They signify the boundary between the profane and the sacred, between what is easily accessed and what must be reverently approached.

Symbolically, the Cherubim in the Royal Master Degree reflect the presence of divine protection and oversight in the life of man. Their outstretched wings suggest shelter, vigilance, and watchfulness. Esoterically, they may be understood as representing the higher faculties of human consciousness, reason, conscience, and spiritual intuition, which stand guard over our most sacred inner truths. These faculties do not reveal truth casually; they protect it, requiring preparation, humility, and moral readiness before it may be approached.

The Ark of the Covenant, resting beneath the wings of the Cherubim, is itself among the most potent symbols in sacred history. Biblically, it was the vessel that contained the tablets of the Law, representing divine order, moral authority, and covenantal responsibility. In Masonic symbolism, the Ark becomes a repository of Divine Truth, unchanging, absolute, and enduring.

On a personal level, the Ark may be understood as the inner sanctum of the human soul: the place where one's core values, moral convictions, and spiritual commitments reside. It is that sacred center within each person where conscience speaks and where truth is held inviolate. Just as the Ark was concealed within the Holy of Holies, so too are our deepest principles not on open display but carefully guarded and revealed through right living.

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When viewed together, the Cherubim and the Ark form a complete symbolic lesson. Divine Truth exists, but it is not unguarded. It is preserved by higher principles: faith, integrity, discipline, and reverence. The wings of the Cherubim remind us that truth must be protected, not merely possessed. The Ark reminds us that moral law is not external alone but internalized within the heart of man.

For the Royal Master, this symbolism is a call to inward stewardship. We are reminded that the most sacred truths we encounter in Masonry and in life must be shielded by virtuous conduct and thoughtful reflection. Only when we align our lives with higher principles do we stand beneath those symbolic wings, safeguarded and guided.

The Cherubim and the Ark in the Royal Master Degree speak timelessly to the human condition: Divine Truth dwells within, but it is revealed only to those who guard it well.

Your Red Coat May Excite the Curiosity of a Masonic Brother -

Submitted by Excellent Ed Tooma, Shenandoah No. 17

The next time you attend a Blue Lodge event, stand out among the crowd, proudly wearing your Royal Arch red coat. It's one sure way you'll have some brothers asking questions.

This will be your opportunity to sound off with answers our Brothers need to know. Arm yourself with brochure pamphlets that explain each Royal Arch Degree, and above all, include a petition. It will also be helpful if you have some information about your local York Rite organizations to hand out (a brief history of your Royal Arch Chapters and Commanderies, the locations, day and times you meet, your community activities and social events, etc.). Make sure these informational packets have the name, email address and phone number of a contact so a Brother can get answers to any remaining questions.

If time permits, request to give a short and informative talk. This of course will be arranged in advance with the Worshipful Master. Make it a red coat night each time you visit a Craft Lodge or appendant body of our Order. Spread the word so all Royal Arch Masons can do likewise. Be proud of who you are, what you are, and show your color.

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CHAPTER / COUNCIL NEWS

District 8 Submitted by Right Excellent Joey Shawn Martin

“Look, Daddy, Teacher says every time a bell rings an angel gets its wings” is a line from the 1947 Christmas movie “It’s A Wonderful Life”. This being the case, there were a lot of angels assembled on December 13th, 2025. Companions from the 8th Capitular District teamed up with Brethren from the 22nd Masonic District to firmly grasp the reins of the “Red Kettle Brigade” again this year to let the bells ring.

By strategic scheduling, Right Worshipful Brother Morris Bennet and Excellent Companion Jerry Martin, were heavily involved with the Roanoke Valley Alzheimer’s walk. Right Worshipful Morris and Excellent Martin had teams strongly placed at the entrances of the Kroger grocery store and the Virginia ABC store, to greet the patrons as they entered and exited both establishments.

This brotherly and quite friendly competition that has been taking place for several years now. The kettle with the most donations earns bragging rights for the year. All the proceeds go to help the needy in the area. Who better to help with community charities than the group that professes a ladder of which one of the principal rungs is charity? There was ringing of bells, dancing, and even what some labeled as singing of Christmas carols to show the spirit of the Brethren involved as well as draw attention to the cause.

One instance of charity was when Companion Shane Wilson spied a little girl with her mom walking by. He shook his bell hard and it did not ring. Drawing the attention of the girl to how he was feverishly shaking his bell with no sound (we all knew the bell wasn’t ringing because of a strategically placed finger), Companion Wilson calmly asked the young lady for help with his bell. Shane shook it once more for her and argued “it has to be broken,” He pleaded to her, and asked if she knew anything about bells and if she could fix it. She grasped the bell firmly and shook it. It magically started to ring. We all praised and thanked the young lady for fixing Companion Shane’s bell. The smile Shane put on her face and the light beaming from her eyes made everyone’s day.

Freemasonry was present, strong, and accounted for that day. When District 8 Royal Arch Masons get out into their community great things manifest. At the time this piece was scripted, the Salvation Army had not reported which team had raised the most money. Was it Team Grocery or possibly Team Alphabet? If you see a Brother from District 22 or a companion from District 8 displaying a huge smile you might be able to surmise the winner.

I hope each person reading this article has the ability to get out and practice these forms of charity, raising much needed funds or placing smiles on faces. Maybe even challenge a Lodge, Chapter, or District to a friendly competition. Either way Capitular Masonry and the community will be winners.

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Team Alphabet from left to right. Companion “Scooter” Darnell, Right Excellent Joey Marin, Companion Shane Wilson, Excellent Companion Jerry Martin, and Worshipful Brother Zack Perry.

District 15 Submitted by: Right Excellent Alan K. Spear, MEHP Shenandoah RAC No. 17

Luray No. 4 Treasurer, Companion John J. Jenkins, announced the birth of daughter Temperance Noel Jenkins on December 14, 2025.

John Dove No. 21 will exemplify the Mark Master degree on February 12, 2026, at their Stated Convocation. Start time will be 1900 hours and will open on the Mark Master Degree.

District No. 15 Table Chapter will be held on 24 October at Cave Ridge Vineyard located in Mount Jackson, VA. This is open to all Masons, friends and spouses. Reservations are required and paid before or at the event in full (\$50.00 each). This is District No. 15’s annual primary fundraiser of the year for Alzheimer’s, MAHOVA and/or the Cancer Society. We have reserved space for 80+ attendees. The MC & entertainer for the event is Right Excellent Dennis Haas. The dress is red

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polo shirt and trousers; ladies can also dress casually. More info will be forthcoming as it becomes available and finalized. The dinner of the evening will be a sit-down corned beef with side dishes.

Excellent Ed Tooma of District 15 encourages you to share the following information with your Brethren in Lodge:

My Fellow Craft Lodge Brethren,

If you have ever contemplated seeking more light in Masonry, now is the time to become a member of the Royal Arch family. I have mentioned this many times, but I am going to say it again - becoming a Companion in this appendant body is not only the Rite thing to do - it's also "The Best First Step to More Light."

The path to more light consists of six Capitular Degrees: the Mark Master, Past Master, Select Master, Royal Master, Most Excellent Master, and The Holy Royal Degree. District 15 has set the example before, and we are about to do it again when it comes to spreading the word about Royal Arch Masonry. Our Red Coat Night has been very popular with inviting our Masonic Brethren to join us. In the New Year, plans for opening our doors to new membership will again be our mission. If you have any questions whatsoever regarding companionship in the York Rite, don't hesitate to email me (edtooma@gmail.com) or ask a Royal Arch Mason in your Lodge.

For additional information, I highly recommend that you visit the Virginia Grand Royal Arch Chapter web page, [Grand Chapter Royal Arch Masons in Virginia - Education](#) and scroll down to the video hosted by Past Grand High Priest, Most Excellent Companion Don McAndrews. What better way to start the new year, the Rite way?

Life is like a wheelbarrow. Nothing ever happens until you start pushing.

He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

Proverbs 10:4

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Shenandoah No. 17 - Submitted by: Rt. Ex. Alan K. Spear, MEHP Shenandoah RAC No. 17

At a Stated meeting of Shenandoah No. 17, we celebrated Veterans Day with the reading of a Patriotic Paper written by an 8th Grader and granddaughter of a Royal Arch Mason.

She was recognized for her achievement as the First Place Winner by the Veteran of Foreign Wars Post No. 2447 on December 08, 2025, with a substantial Scholarship Award. This young woman read her paper to the 70 plus VFW attendees present. May this paper give hope to all those Veterans that the next generation has not lost their way in the world and appreciates all your sacrifices to our Country.

My Patriotism

“Patriotism is more than just a word; it’s a way of showing love and loyalty to the country that gives us freedom and opportunity. In America, we have the right to express ourselves and live in a land shaped by the sacrifices of those before us. Being patriotic means doing our part to keep America strong. I do my part and show patriotism by respecting the flag, donating to veterans, and celebrating traditions.

“Respecting the American flag is one of the most powerful ways I show patriotism. The flag is not just a piece of cloth; it’s a symbol of the lives given to protect our rights. I honor the flag by never letting it touch the ground and keeping it in good condition. Standing for the Pledge of Allegiance is a small way I show my gratitude. Every time I show respect to the flag, I’m reminded of the courage it represents and the thankfulness I feel for being able to live in a free country.

“When I donate to veterans, I’m not just giving money, I’m giving thanks to the heroes who protected our freedom. Supporting veteran organizations help preserve important artifacts that tell the story of American bravery. Donations also fund educational programs that teach about military history and the meaning of service. By giving what I can, I help keep veterans’ stories alive. It is a way to make sure their legacies are never forgotten.

“Celebrating American traditions is a meaningful way I show patriotism and connect with the values that form America. On Memorial Day, I honor the brave men and women who gave their lives for our freedom, by taking a moment of silence. The Fourth of July is another day I celebrate, marking the birth of our nation. I enjoy fireworks and family gatherings that remind me of the courage that built America. Taking part in these traditions keeps history alive and helps me feel connected to the values of freedom.

“Patriotism isn’t something I just talk about; it is something I live through my actions. Whether I’m respecting the flag, donating to veterans, or celebrating traditions, each choice reflects my commitment to honoring our country. These acts remind me of the lives given for America and the

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importance of keeping those stories alive. Patriotism is a responsibility I embrace every day as part of the country that has given me so much.”

Orange No. 47 - submitted by Larry Lloyd, Chapter Secretary

Orange RAC 47 conferred the Council and the Most Excellent Master Degrees at a called Convocation on January 22, 2026 for our candidates. These Degrees were very educational for our candidates and were conferred by our Chapter with many thanks to Right Excellent Christopher Tripp, Associate Grand Lecturer who assisted Most Excellent Russ Snodgrass, Grand Lecturer.

Thanks to all for your attendance and assistance with the Degree work.



First row: Carlos McReddie, John Winn, Russel Snodgrass, Spencer Getz, Christopher Tripp, Stacey Timmons, Larry Lloyd
Second row: Jerry Barnes, David Carl, Eddie Crebbs, Ron Sturm, Garnett Taylor
Picture by Billy Armstrong

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GUEST CONTRIBUTORS

Marcellus de Rochon de Lapérouse
Norfolk United Royal Arch Chapter No. 1

The Architecture of the Soul - Building Character Through Sacred Geometry

Stand for a moment in the center of our Chapter room and observe the sacred geometry that surrounds us. Every angle speaks of divine proportion, every symbol points toward eternal truth, every measurement reflects the Great Architect's perfect design. Yet the most magnificent temple we are called to build lies not in stone and mortar, but within the architecture of our own souls.

The Royal Arch degree reveals to us that we are both architect and temple, designer and dwelling place. Just as the ancient craftsmen worked from sacred plans that ensured both beauty and stability, we too must build our character according to divine specifications. The tools may be different—conscience instead of compass, wisdom rather than square—but the principles remain eternal.

Consider first the foundation upon which all spiritual architecture must rest. No builder begins with ornate capitals or soaring arches; he first ensures that his foundation can bear the weight of what will rise above it. In our personal temple, this foundation is integrity—that bedrock honesty with ourselves and others that makes all higher virtues possible.

Integrity is not merely avoiding falsehood; it is the alignment of thought, word, and deed into a unified whole. Like the perfect ashlar that fits precisely into its destined place, the man of integrity presents the same face to the world that he shows to his mirror. He speaks no word in public that contradicts his private convictions, makes no promise he does not intend to keep, projects no image that conflicts with his inner reality.

This foundation of integrity supports the walls of our spiritual temple. These walls are built from the daily choices that either strengthen or weaken our character. Each act of kindness adds a stone of compassion to our walls. Every moment of patience in the face of provocation places a block of temperance. Each instance of standing for principle despite personal cost contributes a stone of fortitude.

But walls alone do not make a temple. The space they enclose must serve a purpose higher than mere shelter. The interior of our spiritual temple becomes the sanctuary where we commune with our highest ideals, where we retreat for renewal and reflection, where we store the treasures of wisdom gathered throughout our journey.

Here the symbolism of the Royal Arch teaches us profound lessons about the architecture of character. The keystone that completes the arch represents that final element of maturity that transforms a collection of virtues into an integrated character. Just as the keystone bears and distributes the weight of the entire arch, spiritual maturity enables us to bear life's burdens not

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through rigid resistance but through flexible strength that adapts to pressure while maintaining structural integrity.

The geometry of the arch itself holds deep meaning for our personal development. Unlike a post-and-lintel construction that depends on the strength of individual elements, the arch distributes weight throughout the structure. Similarly, mature character does not depend solely on one outstanding virtue but creates a balanced distribution of moral qualities that support one another.

The man who possesses courage without temperance becomes reckless. Compassion without wisdom enables harmful indulgence. Justice without mercy hardens into cruelty. But when these virtues are properly proportioned and mutually supporting—like the stones of a well-built arch—they create a character of remarkable strength and beauty.

Sacred geometry also teaches us about proportion in our spiritual architecture. The ancient builders understood that certain ratios create not only structural stability but aesthetic harmony. In our character development, this principle manifests as the need for balance among competing demands and virtues.

The successful professional who neglects his family creates disproportion that weakens his entire life structure. The devoted father who abandons all personal growth limits his ability to guide his children. The generous philanthropist who ignores his own spiritual development may find his charity becoming mere display. Like a building where one wall bears too much weight while others remain underutilized, a life out of proportion eventually shows stress fractures.

The Royal Arch Mason learns to apply the principles of sacred geometry to his daily choices. He measures his responses with the compass of reason, tests his decisions against the square of moral law, and ensures that his life maintains the proper proportions of work and rest, service and reflection, giving and receiving.

Perhaps most importantly, our spiritual architecture must include spaces for growth and adaptation. The ancient temples included courts and chambers for different purposes, recognizing that spiritual life requires various types of space. Similarly, our character must have room for learning from failure, space for forgiveness of ourselves and others, chambers for quiet contemplation, and halls where we can welcome fellowship with our brothers.

The beauty of this architectural metaphor lies in its dynamic nature. Unlike physical buildings that deteriorate over time, our spiritual temples can grow stronger with age. Each challenge successfully met adds to our structural integrity. Every lesson learned increases our capacity. Each act of service expands our ability to serve.

Moreover, as Royal Arch Masons, we recognize that we do not build alone. Just as the ancient craftsmen worked in harmony under the direction of skilled masters, we labor alongside our Companions in the great work of mutual improvement. The wisdom of our predecessors provides the architectural plans, the support of our contemporaries supplies the strength for heavy lifting,

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and our obligation to future generations ensures that we build not just for ourselves but for those who will follow.

The tools of our speculative craft—working tools refined through centuries of symbolic use—remain perfectly suited for this spiritual architecture. The trowel still spreads the cement of fraternal affection. The level still ensures that we meet each person with appropriate respect. The plumb still tests whether our actions align with our professed principles.

As we continue our work on the temple of character, let us remember that this architecture serves a purpose beyond personal satisfaction. A well-built spiritual temple becomes a place where others can find shelter from life's storms, guidance in confusion, and inspiration for their own building projects. Like a lighthouse whose light guides ships safely to harbor, the Royal Arch Mason whose character is properly proportioned and firmly founded becomes a beacon for others seeking their way.

In our daily labor, may we prove worthy architects of our own souls, faithful builders in the service of the Great Architect, and living temples that honor the sacred geometry of virtue revealed in our ancient and honorable Craft.

So mote it be.

Support for Widows

Remember to invite widows to social events such as monthly fellowship lunch, Lodge picnics, and of course Ladies Night. Sending cards for holidays throughout the year is also a good practice to follow. This may require you to update and maintain an accurate list of contact information, including the widows' preference regarding email, phone calls, cards and visits. Here are some tips that may be useful in putting these ideas into practice:

Listen and validate feelings - The most important gift a widow can receive is a shoulder to lean on and an ear that really listens. Be a compassionate listener and validate their feelings without judgment. Sometimes, having someone to confide in can provide immense comfort and relief.

Create new traditions - Encourage the widow to create new traditions or rituals that honor their late partner while also embracing the present. Lodge events can be perfect for this purpose.

Arrange a gathering - Offer to plan to spend some time with them and some of their loved ones, whether it's a simple coffee at their home, or a walk in the park. The presence of their support system can provide comfort and companionship during these visits. It is usually a good idea to have family involved in visits, or at least aware of visits.