

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

The Keystone

April 2026 Vol. 10 No. 3

Contents



Contents

<u>MOST EXCELLENT GRAND HIGH PRIEST/ MOST ILLUSTRIOUS GRAND MASTER'S MESSAGE..</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>GRAND KING'S MESSAGE.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>GRAND SCRIBE'S MESSAGE.....</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>GRAND PROVOST AND/OR COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND SERVICE MESSAGE.....</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>GRAND CHAPLAIN'S MESSAGE.....</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>CHAPTER / COUNCIL NEWS.....</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>GUEST CONTRIBUTORS.....</u>	<u>16</u>

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

**Want your articles or pictures published here
or have a question for Zerubbabel? Send your
submissions to thevakeystone@gmail.com.**

The Virginia Keystone Newsletter - April 2026

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

Ho, Companions!

Son of Man, Mark Well: The Call to Complete the Work

Greetings, my Companions,

As we move forward into the Spring Season of our Capitular year, we do so under the guidance of a sacred charge:

"Son of Man, Mark Well."

This phrase, drawn from the visions of Ezekiel and echoed through our foundational Mark Master degree, is more than just a piece of ritual, it is a mandate for our behavior, our leadership, and our future!

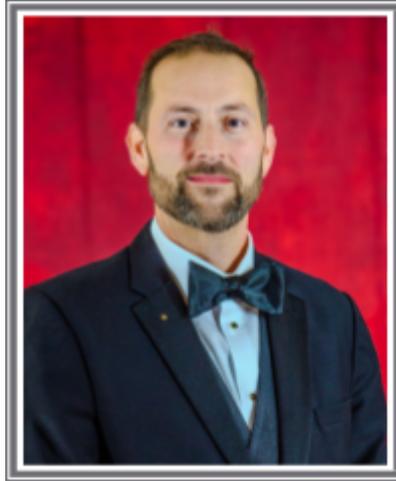
In the Book of Ezekiel, the title "Son of Man" is used nearly a hundred times. It is a title that serves a dual purpose: it reminds the prophet, and it reminds us, of our humanity. We are but men, humble in our nature and limited in our understanding compared to the Divine Architect. Yet, we are commanded to "Mark Well," to behold with our eyes and hear with our ears the ordinances of the house. In our Chapters, this means we must be intentional. We must ensure that the "work" we present to the world is not just sufficient, but perfect and proper. As we strengthen our Craft, let us look through the lens of three critical "Vs":

Visibility, Viability, and Versatility.

Visibility in Action: Success of the Red Coats

We cannot be the "hidden" part of the Masonic journey. To "Mark Well" our work,

[Return to Contents Page](#)



we must be present where our Brethren are. I have been personally invigorated by the enthusiasm shown during recent **Red Coat Nights**, where I had the honor of serving as guest speaker.

At each of these visits, the message resonated: the Royal Arch is the essential completion of the Master Mason's journey. **I am now issuing a challenge to every District Deputy, every High Priest, and every Companion: Seek your invitation.** Coordinate with your local Lodges. Don your Red Coats with pride. These visits are the front lines of our membership strategy.

The 2026 Statewide Royal Arch Festival

To further assist Brethren in finding that which was lost, we have authorized a **Statewide Royal Arch Festival**. This is a unique opportunity for candidates to receive all the Capitular Degrees in a single day of fellowship and solemnity alongside Brethren from across the Commonwealth.

- **When:** Saturday, June 13, 2026
- **Where:** Richmond-Washington RAC No. 3-9 (Manwood Masonic Temple)
- **How to Participate:** Candidates must be elected by their local Chapter prior to the festival date. Get those petitions ready now!

Mark well the path to Richmond this June. If you know a Brother who has felt a void in the

The Virginia Keystone Newsletter - April 2026

narrative of Ancient Craft Masonry, tell him plainly: the Royal Arch is the discovery that fulfills the promise. It also extends the bridge of our York Rite Journey and paves the way to further enlightenment in Chivalric Masonry with the Knight Templar.

A Legacy of Liberty: The 250th Anniversary

As we approach the 250th anniversary of our nation on July 4, 2026, we remember that the history of the Royal Arch is inextricably linked with the history of liberty. **I have issued a Proclamation that every Chapter in Virginia shall hold or participate in an event honoring this milestone.** Whether it is a community BBQ, a parade, or a wreath-laying ceremony at the tomb of a patriot like our first GHP, Robert Brough, let the Royal Arch be seen as a pillar of the community.

The Recruiter of One

I leave you with a personal challenge: Be a **"Recruiter of One."** You already know who he is, it's the Master Mason who asks, "Is that all there is?" Mark well his curiosity. Mark well his diligence. Give him a personal invitation to find the True Word.

Our success is not final, but if we work together as **T.E.A.M.S.** (Together Effectively Achieving Membership Strength), we will ensure that the light of the Royal Arch in Virginia shines brighter than ever before.

Mark well the work, Companions. Mark well the man. And may the Supreme Grand High Priest bless you, your family, your labors, and your journey.

Grand High Priest's Corner: A Look Ahead

- Thursday, April 2 – GM OV Masonic District 33
- Saturday, April 11 – GHP OV District 20
- Friday, April 17 – GHP OV District 11
- Saturday, April 18 – GHP OV District 12
- Friday-Saturday, May 1-2 – GAC Grand Commandery Knights Templar of VA
- Tuesday, May 5 – Red Coat Night GHP Visit, Willis V. Fentress Lodge No. 296
- Thursday, May 7 – Red Coat Night GHP Visit, Churchland Lodge No. 276
- Friday, May 8 – Red Coat Night GHP Visit, Ocean View Lodge No. 335
- Saturday, May 16 – Garden of Gethsemane Tabernacle No. II HRAKTP
- Sunday, May 17 – Order of the Eastern Star Grand Session
- Friday, May 29 – GHP OV District 3
- Saturday, May 30 – District 2 Alzheimer's Walk
- **Saturday, June 13 – Statewide Festival: Secure your petitions today!**

Son of Man, Mark Well,

Kyle W. Strickland
Grand High Priest

GRAND KING'S MESSAGE

Ho, Companions!

An Unhappy Mind, Part 2

"No use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then."

Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll

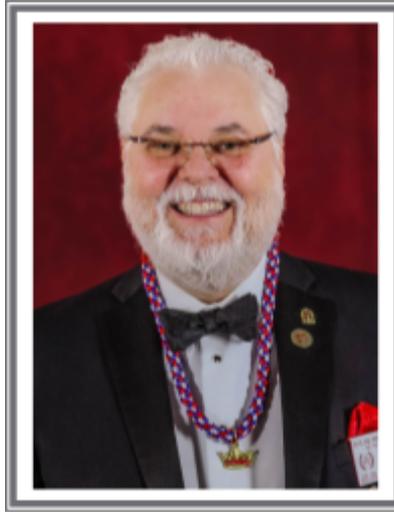
"We suffer more in imagination than in reality."

Letters on Ethics to Lucilius by Seneca

Let's be honest. How many times have you not been paying attention to what is in front of you? You and your wife have been having a one-sided conversation, and you were the one not listening. You don't remember the name of someone you just met five minutes ago. Someone asked you a question, but you don't know what it was. Instead, you were thinking about paying the bills, or the football game, or something... anything else.

Here's another one. How many times have you seen a table at a restaurant where everyone is on their smartphones, heads down with neck flexing between 33–45 degrees (Lee et al.)? Doomscrolling something or other, but not with each other. Or you are talking with someone and one of you gets that buzz in the pocket, picks up the phone and reads/sends a text where there was a conversation only a moment earlier.

This has become all too common, and is now becoming accepted behavior in society, even



in open lodge (yes), and even more troubling, in our homes. Is *being present* in the moment important in relation to our happiness? And if yes, are there tools we can use, other than simply being told to “do better”? Let's look at the scientific literature and find out.

Do our minds wander? Well yes, we know this answer intuitively

from our daily experiences. There is now evidence, using various techniques such as functional MRI scanning, that has determined that our brain's default network is indeed *mind-wandering*. Research demonstrates that our brain's “default network is active when individuals are engaged in internally focused tasks... (Buckner et al.)” Focused attention is not our “go-to” system, mind-wandering is. Further research at the Washington University School of Medicine showed that these baseline brain activities were suspended by attention-demanding, “goal-directed behaviors (Raichle et al.)” Put another way, our default brain wanders unless we focus on something specific.

The question we should then ask is, so what? If that is our brain's default mode, then so be it. Wander away. But we should also ask, does this come at a price? That is the question that Drs. Killingsworth and Gilbert asked (Killingsworth and Gilbert). In their landmark paper published in *Science*, they looked at the degree of mind wandering across more than 22 different activities and then measured

happiness at that moment. Among other things, these activities included work, travel, reading, eating, talking, and watching TV. What did they find? Mind wandering was common across all activities except one: sex. Their study revealed that “people were less happy when their minds were wandering than when they were not.” This was true even if the mind wandering was a pleasant event. One question could be, well, aren’t unhappy or moody people more likely to mind wander? They looked at that as well and the analysis didn’t bear that out.

They concluded that “a human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind. The ability to think about what is not happening is a cognitive achievement that comes at an emotional cost (Killingsworth and Gilbert 932).” Dr. Andrew Huberman, Stanford University neuroscientist, summarized the paper this way, “to have the ability to be fully engaged in what you are doing at a given moment. That is the strongest predictor of being happy (“How Meditation” 00:51:30).” Putting these several papers together, we can infer that our brains will wander at baseline, that this is associated with unhappiness, and that focused attention on tasks will impede our wandering brains. This isn’t to say that we must become the consummate Stoic and believe that *all* daydreaming or mind-wandering should be eliminated, but to be aware of the happiness cost, especially when it interferes with our interactions with others.

Great, then are there simple tools for our toolbox we can use? Yes, there are myriads of them and three come to mind:

1. Meditation
2. Smartphones
3. Five senses

Meditation has been shown to help, but is such a large and complex subject, I will leave it for another time to review. Suffice it to say there are many benefits to meditation (*12 Benefits*). One study by Dr. Suzuki and colleagues at NYU demonstrated that doing a daily meditation practice of only 13 minutes over 8 weeks enhanced attention and memory, while decreasing anxiety and negative mood (Basso et al. 208). Lady Susan and I practice a morning meditation daily.

The next tool is simple to conceptualize, but harder to do given our habit formation with our tech gadgets. Put down your smartphone! Have you heard of phubbing? “Phubbing is a portmanteau of the words “phone” and “snubbing”. To be phubbed is to be snubbed by someone using their cell phone when in your company (Roberts and David 134).” *Ouch*. The title of this article is “My life has become a major distraction from my cell phone.” *Double ouch*. If this is with your romantic partner, it is Partner phubbing or Pphubbing. Simply having your phone on the table or in your hand decreases the quality of the conversation (Misra et al.). Just put it away so you can focus on the conversation in front of you and not allow your mind to wander, being enchanted by the buzz in your pocket. Yes, easier said than done.

The other tool is old school when it comes to focus. Use your five senses. There are several variations on this theme, but I’ll share the simplest ones here. Spend a minute on each of

the following steps to bring you into the present moment.

1. Sight: Look at things around you that you might not typically notice.
2. Touch: Can you feel the chair under your sit bones, or a breeze blowing across your skin?
3. Sound: What can you hear around you that you may not have noticed before?
4. Smell: Is there something in the air you were not paying attention to?
5. Taste: Get your taste buds working with something like gum, water, or even tasting the salt on your skin.

Such multisensory experiences have been shown to lead to relaxation through its impact on anchoring the senses (Finck et al.).

When communicating with others, you can think about using your senses here as well. Many have heard of Toastmasters International. Some of the tools they use also incorporate sensory techniques. This allows others to become more engaged and present with your message, bringing them into your story by creating word pictures and describing sounds and smells. "Research shows that when multiple senses are triggered, people are more likely to engage, remember, and act on messages (Darling, par. 1)."

If you are in a conversation, focus on using your ears and eyes first and foremost. We have heard many times that everything you need to know you learned in Sunday School,

or Kindergarten. This goes for paying attention to others, too. Suzanne Poulette Truesdale, a speech pathologist, developed a technique for children called Whole-Body Listening. This "teaches that listening does not happen only with the ears: it includes the brain to think about what is being said or taking place; the eyes to look at or towards the speaker; the mouth to stay quiet while someone else is talking; and the hands, feet, and bottom to be still and not distract the speaker or other listeners (Sautter)." Kindergarten indeed!

Wendy Lustbader, associate professor at the University of Washington, opined that "the cancellation of presence has gone too far (Lustbader)." I think that many of us would agree, and we are sometimes guilty of not being present in our work, with our families, brothers or companions. Based on neuroscience, we now know that our brains want to wander, and we must work to pay attention. It isn't going to be easy, but it is important in our hunger for happiness. I'll end this essay with a quote from Paulo Coelho's masterpiece, *The Alchemist*. "If you pay attention to the present, you can improve upon it. And, if you improve on the present, what comes later will also be better. Forget about the future, and live each day according to the teachings, confident that God loves his children. Each day, in itself, brings with it an eternity (Coelho 106)."

Sincerely and Fraternally,

Joel T. Bundy, MD
Grand King

The Virginia Keystone Newsletter - April 2026

Works Cited

Basso, Julia C, et al. "Brief, Daily Meditation Enhances Attention, Memory, Mood, and Emotional Regulation in Non-Experienced Meditators." *Behavioural Brain Research*, vol. 356, 2019, pp. 208–20, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbr.2018.08.023>.

Buckner, Randy L, et al. "The Brain's Default Network." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, vol. 1124, no. 1, 2008, pp. 1–38, <https://doi.org/10.1196/annals.1440.011>.

Carroll, Lewis. *Alice in Wonderland*. Classic Edition, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2018.

Coelho, Paulo. *The Alchemist*. 25th anniversary edition, Harper Collins, 2014.

Darling, Stephanie. *Toastmasters International: Sense-Ational Presentations. Activate the 5 Basic Senses to Make Your Stories Memorable*. Toastmasters.org, July 2024, www.toastmasters.org/magazine/magazine-issues/2024/july/five-senses. Accessed 3 Feb. 2026.

Finck, Carolyn, et al. "A Multisensory Mindfulness Experience: Exploring the Promotion of Sensory Awareness as a Mindfulness Practice." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 14, 2023, p. 1230832, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1230832>.

"How Meditation Works and Science-Based Effective Meditations." *YouTube*, uploaded by Andrew

Huberman [Andrew Huberman], 31 Oct. 2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTBSGgbIvsY%26t=3169s.

Killingsworth, Matthew A, and Daniel T Gilbert. "A Wandering Mind Is an Unhappy Mind." *Science*, vol. 330, no. 6006, 2010, pp. 932–932, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1192439>.

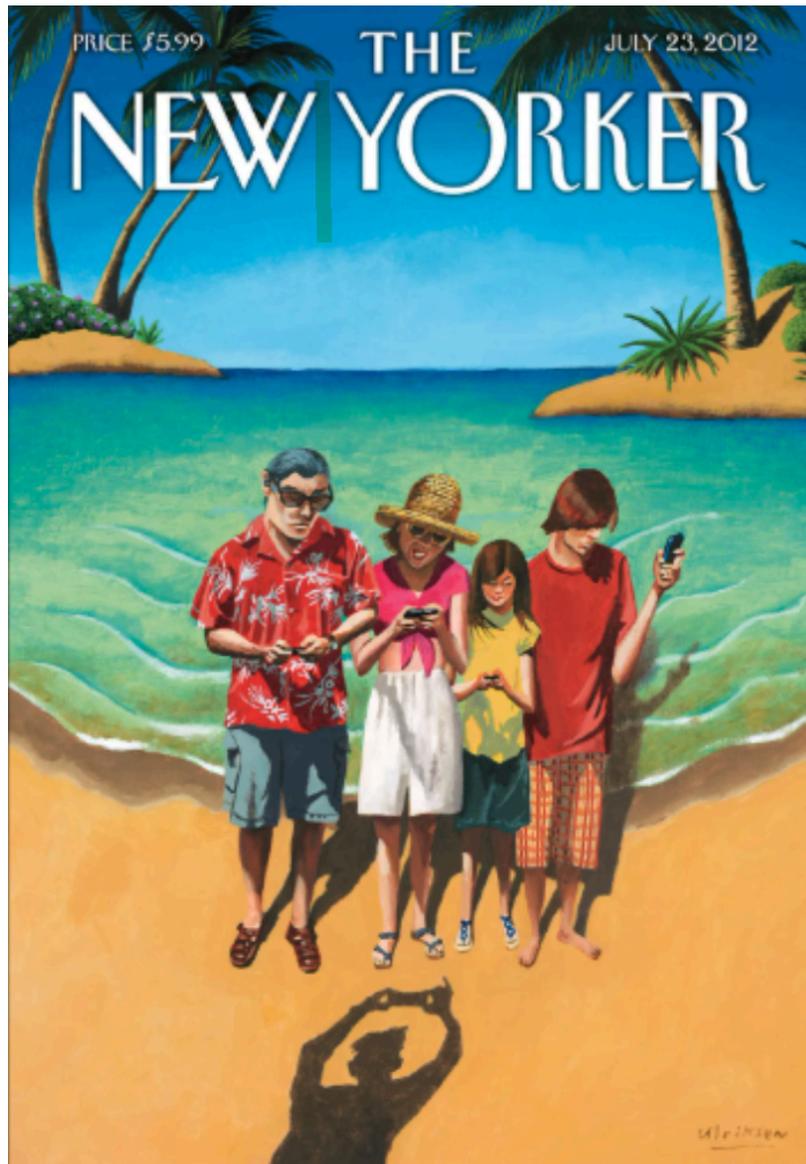
Lee, Sojeong, et al. "Head Flexion Angle While Using a Smartphone." *Ergonomics*, vol. 58, no. 2, 2014, pp. 220–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00140139.2014.967311>.

Lustbader, Wendy. "Can We Still Pay Attention to Each Other?" *Psychology Today*, 8 Feb. 2023, www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/life-gets-better/202302/can-we-still-pay-attention-to-each-other#.

Misra, Shalini, et al. "The iPhone Effect." *Environment and Behavior*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2014, pp. 275–98, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916514539755>.

Raichle, Marcus E, et al. "A Default Mode of Brain Function." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 98, no. 2, 2001, pp. 676–82, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.98.2.676>.

Roberts, James A, and Meredith E David. "My Life Has Become a Major Distraction from My Cell Phone: Partner Phubbing and Relationship



Capturing the Memories

Mark Ulriksen

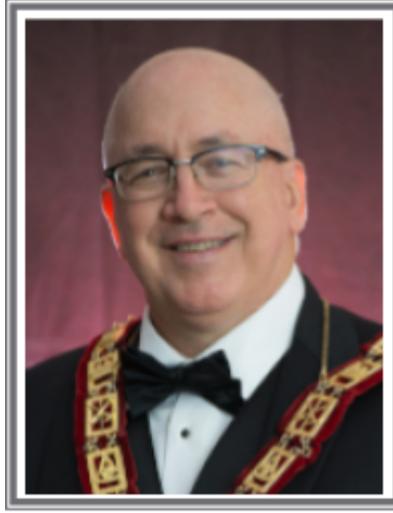
A man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who can't read them.

Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge

Proverbs 23:12

GRAND SCRIBE'S MESSAGE

Ho, Companions!



Have you ever seen the Royal Arch banners in use? Do you know why the colors of the four veils were selected? What might we learn from them that can help us in our daily life? If you ever visit Norfolk United No. 1 or the Royal Arch Room at Mason's Hall in Richmond, you can see those banners. The first banner is blue (of course), with the name of Dan and a picture of an eagle. The second banner is purple, with the name of Reuben and a picture of a man. The third banner is scarlet, with the name of Ephraim and a picture of an ox. And the last banner is white, with the name of Judah and a picture of a lion. Their colors, which are the same as those of the three Veils and the Royal Arch Captain, were taken from the Book of Exodus, in which Moses, Oholiab, and Bezaleel were commissioned by God to fabricate the curtains of the Tabernacle surrounding the Ark of the Covenant with threads of those colors. The tribes of Judah, Ephraim, Reuben, and Dan were the key leaders of Israel when traveling through the wilderness; each supervised two other tribes and when they camped, they gathered around the Ark of the Covenant with Judah in the east, Reuben in the north, Ephraim in the west, and Dan in the south. The pictures on the banners are traditionally associated with those tribes, but more interesting even is that the Seraphim seen by the prophet Isaiah and St. John the Evangelist were heavenly beings that had four faces: a lion, an ox, a man, and

an eagle. Why did God select those four tribes for leadership? Reuben was the firstborn of Jacob; Ephraim was the firstborn of Joseph, Jacob's favorite son; Jacob had blessed Judah as a young lion, while Dan had been blessed as a judge. Interesting history, yes, and it explains much about the Biblical basis for our ritual, but how can this

guide us in our daily lives? **First**, it is important to remember that those great patriarchs were flawed and sinful people, just like us. Reuben unforgivably sinned against his father and lost his birthright to Joseph, whose firstborn was Ephraim. As we learn in the Fellowcraft Degree, the tribesmen of Ephraim were haughty and proud, they knew they were the favorite son and made sure all Israelites knew it too. Judah was the fourth son of Jacob, initiated the sale of Joseph into Egyptian slavery, and sinned greatly against his son's wife. Samson of the tribe of Dan became Judge of Israel but was destroyed because of his sin; the tribe of Dan much later set up the pagan sacrifices that ultimately led to the Assyrians destroying ten of Israel's tribes. **Second**, as Royal Arch Masons, our theme is "Holiness to the Lord". We are expected to be examples to all Masons by our lives and conduct. We must be holy just as our Father in heaven is holy. We sometimes hear that it is better to ask for forgiveness than for permission. That is not God's way; He expects obedience to his commandments. Remember that the prophet Samuel told King

The Virginia Keystone Newsletter - April 2026

Saul that it is better to obey than to offer burnt offerings and sacrifices. **Third**, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but He uses imperfect tools like us to accomplish His purposes. When we do fall short, God is merciful and kind and desires us to have a penitent and humble heart. Judah much later honestly repented of his sins, led a virtuous life, and from him came the royal line of Kings. Christians include Jesus, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, in that royal line.

We say that we first became a Mason in our heart and that we value the internal and not the external qualifications of the Man. God values the same things, he looks into our hearts, and judges and rewards what he finds there. He alone can fix our brokenness, draw us to Him, and achieve reconciliation. As King David said, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."

Sincerely and Fraternally,
Thomas L. Varner
Grand Scribe



The Virginia Keystone Newsletter - April 2026

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

Matthew Rutkowski, Sr. Warwick No. 80 2/4/2026

Samuel A. Marso, Manassas No. 81, 2/20/2026

Charles M. Abatsis, Princess Anne No. 1607, 3/23/2026

Dashel F. Macayana, Great Bridge No. 82, 3/23/2026

Consider the Symbolism of the West, submitted by Stephen L. Young

The four cardinal points of the navigator's compass are prominent features of all Masonic ritual. We are very familiar with the Worshipful Master, Senior Warden, and Junior Warden being stationed in the East, West, and South, respectively. The cardinal directions are also referenced in many phrases of ritual, including "as the sun rises in the East", "as the sun sets in the West", "the sun in the South, at meridian", and "the North... deemed a place of darkness."

So much of our focus is on an officer's journey to the station of the Worshipful Master or High Priest, to the East. To many, this symbolizes traveling toward more light, toward the rising sun. The West also holds important symbolic significance, some of which is addressed below.

The West is frequently linked with the end of a journey or the fulfillment of God's promises. The Israelites' journey from Egypt to the Promised Land is a movement from east to west, symbolizing a transition from bondage to freedom. (1)

In a familiar ritual, Ruffians travel a westerly course from the Temple, and Fellowcrafts travel west to Joppa. Both of these examples are symbolic of the end, or nearly the end, of a journey.

For a candidate, the journey toward light can also be symbolized by the cardinal points of the compass, and particularly the West. Frequently in ritual, after a candidate is deemed to have the required qualifications and at the Worshipful Master's or High Priest's order, he journeys from the East to the West. In the West, there may be additional examination of his qualifications, and he receives instructions in preparation for the next step in his travels. Finally, he is positioned at the West of the altar to take an obligation, and to receive the light he sought when the journey began. This is a parallel to the Israelites' journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Look well to the West!

(1) March 3, 2026, The Significance of Direction, [Biblehub.com](https://biblehub.com/topical/t/the_significance_of_direction.htm)
https://biblehub.com/topical/t/the_significance_of_direction.htm

The Virginia Keystone Newsletter - April 2026

GRAND CHAPLAIN'S MESSAGE

Companions,

As we approach the season of Easter, I write to you with a spirit of hope and a renewed sense of purpose. The resurrection calls us to more than remembrance; it calls us to action, to charity, and to a life that bears witness to the truths we hold dear. In keeping with the Grand High Priest's theme, **"Son of Man, Mark Well,"** I invite each companion to mark well the needs around us and to consider how our lives reflect the light of the resurrection.

To mark well is to pay attention. It is to notice the companion who has not been seen at chapter, the family quietly carrying a burden, and the neighbor who struggles with illness or loneliness. It is to respond with deliberate compassion rather than with hurried words or passing concern. Our ritual teaches that charity is not merely an ideal; it is a practice. The resurrection compels us to be instruments of consolation and agents of renewal. When we answer that call, we honor both the principles of our order and the example set before us.

Easter invites personal renewal as surely as spring renews the earth. Take time for prayer and reflection in the coming days. Revisit the lessons of our degrees and consider how they shape your conduct in public and private life. Ask yourself how your actions reflect the light of the resurrection. Are you a steady presence for your chapter and your community? Do your deeds align with the principles you profess?

Our witness is most persuasive when it is lived rather than proclaimed. When companions come together to help a brother, when a chapter organizes a visit to the Masonic home, when members volunteer time and skills to repair a neighbor's home, those acts speak louder than any speech. Authenticity cannot be purchased. It is earned through consistent, humble service. Let our lives be such that when others ask why we give of our time and resources, we can answer with clarity and conviction.

Unity is another fruit of the resurrection. The truth we celebrate binds us across differences and reminds us that we are part of a larger story. Disunity and indifference weaken our witness. Let us therefore cultivate a spirit of brotherly love that is visible in our lodges and in our public lives. Be quick to encourage, slow to judge, and ready to reconcile.

Practical acts matter. Consider reaching out to companions who have not been seen for some time. Offer a ride to chapter for a member who cannot drive. Support the families of those who serve our fraternity in leadership. Small gestures often have the greatest impact. They show that our concern is not merely ceremonial but personal and enduring.

As you observe this season, let the Grand High Priest's charge guide you. Mark well the needs you encounter. Mark well the opportunities to serve. Mark well the ways in which your life bears witness to the resurrection. In doing so, you will strengthen your chapter, honor our traditions, and bring comfort and hope to those who need it most.

[Return to Contents Page](#)

The Virginia Keystone Newsletter - April 2026

May this season renew your faith and deepen your commitment to the principles of Royal Arch Masonry. May it inspire acts of kindness that ripple outward into our communities. May the risen Christ grant you wisdom and courage as you live out the charge to love and to serve.

Fraternally,

William A. Crosscup, V
Grand Chaplain



It is the character of very few men to honor without envy a friend who has prospered.

A friend loves at all times...

Proverbs 17:17

The Virginia Keystone Newsletter - April 2026

CHAPTER / COUNCIL NEWS

District No. 18 Submitted by Larry Lloyd, Chapter Secretary Orange Royal Arch Chapter 47



The above is a photo of the Official Visit of Most Excellent Kyle William Strickland, Grand High Priest, Grand Chapter Royal Arch Masons of Virginia, to District 18. This was held on February 21st at Orange Royal Arch Chapter 47 at Waddell Masonic Lodge 228 in Gordonsville, VA.

This was a big night for the 18th District and Rt. Ex. David A. Carl DDGHP, who was representing Orange Royal Arch Chapter No. 47 and the 18th District. Previous to the Tiled Official Visit, the meal was prepared by Comp. Rudy Richardson was well enjoyed by the Companions and their ladies. This was a well-attended and successful night for Royal Arch Masonry and the 18th District.

The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook.

A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is his glory to overlook an offense.

Proverbs 19:11

The Virginia Keystone Newsletter - April 2026

Chapter No. 2 - Submitted by: Mt. Ex. Russel G. Snodgrass, Grand Lecturer



Mathew Todd Szramoski (center) stopped by the Royal Arch Chapter table at the Division Education and Leadership Conference in Waynesboro on March 7. The table was manned by Brother/Companion Cody Wright (left) and Rt. Wor./Mt. Ex. Russel Snodgrass (right).



Waynesboro Union No. 2 Degree Team after the conferral of the Mark Master Degree on Companion Christian Fisher.
First row: George Dudley, Bill Wimer, Christian Fisher, Russ Snodgrass, Rusty Johnson, Wayne Wenger, Emory Merryman
Second row: Tony Daniel, Frank Hall, Eric Swortzel, J. D. Davis, Ed Dearing, Ron Sturm, Matthew Caldwell; photo by Steve Young

GUEST CONTRIBUTORS

Companion A. N. (Andy) Hampton
Cradock #72
Chesapeake, VA February 2026

Understanding What is Being Asked, Not Just Saying Words

“By the wisdom of the Supreme High Priest, may we be directed, by his strength may we be enabled, and by the beauty of his holiness may we be incited to perform the obligation here enjoined on us, to keep inviolably the mysteries here unfolded to us and invariably to practice all those duties out of the chapter which are inculcated in it. So Mote It Be, Amen.” – The Virginia Textbook of Royal Arch Masonry, John Dove, 1853

At the end of every Royal Arch Chapter stated convocation, with its members in a particular form about the altar, the dais officers descend to cement closed the opening that remains. At the pinnacle of the formation stands the High Priest of the Chapter who prays the prayer above. I have witnessed it in convocations, at the Grand level, while visiting other Chapters, and at my Mother Chapter (Cradock #72). Initially, I was absolutely amazed at the memory of the High Priest and Grand High Priest praying this prayer. As time has progressed, I have gotten past the inevitable distractions that happen when the High Priest is closing us out and now reflect on the meaning of the ask. The more I listen to the prayer, the more striking its words and their placement become. Upon further contemplation and reflection, I think to myself, do all of us have the same understanding of what is truly be asked through the advocacy of this prayer by the High Priest?

Accountability is a word that we utilize when there is a perception that something is owed. It may be holding someone accountable for a lawless act, for unjust or less-than-Masonic conduct, or when dealing with a child who needs to be held to account for their actions. In this closing prayer, it is my belief that it is a prayer to hold us as Royal Arch Masons (Companions) accountable. More than spoken words, they are a request upon deity that He holds us accountable for those things that we know or have been exposed to and are learning. Accountability is referred to in our Masonic walk, yet it is not often expounded on in conversation. Throughout the closing prayer, accountability is the theme and, dare I say, the intent.

“By the wisdom of the Supreme High Priest may we be directed...” In the very first line, we are asking that our actions be driven by his will, not our own. We are asking for his guidance through his omniscience or innate all-knowing power. In the prayer, we are asking for God’s presence and divine influence in our earthly work in the quarry as Companions.

“By his strength may we be enabled.” The long and winding roads, the dark and, at times, lonesome depths of our earthly walk, may often seem unyielding and beyond our ability to overcome. In this portion of the prayer, we are asking for an advance on the potency and grit that

The Virginia Keystone Newsletter - April 2026

will be necessary to produce that good work, square work, just such work that is needed for the temple. An advance in the strength of body and soul so that we are able to maintain our accountability to the work.

“...and by the beauty of his holiness may we be incited to perform the obligation here enjoined on us...” When I read, hear, or contemplate this portion, it always takes me to the example that our Supreme High Priest laid out for us. What an example to strive towards, although obtaining perfection in any endeavor is not achievable, being accountable to that fact and working daily to draw closer to his example...keeping ourselves accountable. It is a lofty goal to ever strive towards emulating his example.

In the second part of this line, we ask to be **“incited to perform the obligation here enjoined on us.”** Incited has numerous synonyms; the formal sounding ones are words like encouraged, motivated, or caused, all of which could easily replace incited and still be stirring to the Companion when recited. Other, less formal words that may also be compelling based on the individual Companion would be those such as spurred, goaded, or provoked. Depending on your interpretation, application of the appropriate word may vary. Obligation is a word that we use throughout our journey in the Masonic bodies. It too has familiar synonyms such as promise, commitment, responsibility, and duty. We are aware that with every obligation undertaken in the Capitular and Cryptic degrees, we are verbally signing a contract to do the right thing. Lastly, in this line, I draw your attention to “enjoined.” We are enjoined to perform that obligation, or in other words, directed, ordered, and commanded by the Supreme High Priest to fulfill our obligation to each other, to our families, and to the world at large.

“...to keep inviolably the mysteries here unfolded to us...” The root word of inviolably being inviolable, which simply means not to break or injure. We keep the mysteries entrusted to us both in and out of the Chapter sacred. Once exalted to the Royal Arch Degree, we are accountable for many signs, forms, and words. Each of us is a custodian of these ancient symbols. We are accountable to keep them and to seek them. It is imperative that we all govern ourselves accordingly.

“...and invariably to practice all those duties out of the chapter which are inculcated in it...” Invariably is a great word that stipulates that you are going to execute the duties that you learned in Chapter always, habitually, and perpetually. Not only are we to practice those moral lessons that we apply in Chapter, but we are also going to do them outside of Chapter in the world. Amongst the cowans and eavesdroppers, we are to be that example that is good, kind, and upright in our actions. **“Inculcated”** seemingly is a word that was created at the Goose and Gridiron in 1717 and used primarily, if not exclusively, by Masonic organizations. Inculcated, simply stated, is taught, instilled, or infused. Thus, we are invoking the deity to hold us to the duties we asked for and that have been instilled and infused within us.

The more I listen to the prayer, the more striking its words and their placement become. Upon further contemplation and reflection, I think to myself, do all of us have the same understanding of what is truly being asked through the advocacy of this prayer by the High Priest?

[Return to Contents Page](#)

The Virginia Keystone Newsletter - April 2026

The man at the point of our form around the altar is advocating to the Supreme High Priest on behalf of us all. Let us all be subject to and examples of that advocacy through the High Priest's closing prayer.

So Mote It Be...

Works Cited

Dove, J. (1853). *The Virginia Textbook of Royal Arch Masonry*. Richmond: Charles H Wynne.

Coleman Bradfield,
Secretary, Shenandoah Royal Arch Chapter No. 17
Edinburgh, Virginia

What Freemasonry is to Me

What is Freemasonry, you might ask? Some people say it's a cult that worships the devil, some say it's a religion, I call it a lifestyle. Sometimes people question the unknown and make up tales to get attention or to make people wonder. Freemasonry is neither a religion nor a cult, but is in fact a group of people joined together as a whole working on the same level to do good in the community and help those in need. We also strive to make our members, family, and those close to us better. What many people don't realize is how much Freemasons do behind the scenes. Freemasons donate millions to medical research (cancer, dementia), fund local air ambulances, and support food banks. They provide direct, often anonymous, assistance to individuals in distress, such as covering utility bills, or supporting children's hospitals through initiatives like delivering Teddies for Loving care to help children cope with difficult situations. Institutions like the Shriners and the Scottish Rite Childhood Language program are dedicated to helping children. Other appendant bodies of Freemasonry include the Virginia Royal Arch Chapter, which has donated over \$100,000 to Alzheimer's research. There are many more charitable organizations that Masonry supports. Freemasonry is a Brotherhood of Man, under the Fatherhood of God, which allows people from all walks of life, no matter how high or how low you think you are, and when you meet a fellow brother Mason, you are equal. You will never be alone, as every brother out there will have your back when you are in need. Masonry will teach you to be a better speaker, have more patience, and just walk this life with a better attitude towards one another and the world. There are members who specialize in different aspects of the lodge, whether it be helping with meetings, holding an office, helping with events and local charities, or members who teach the craft and perfect it. There's also the historical aspect, and if you are an avid History buff, you'll never find another group with deeper historical roots than Freemasonry. So, to sum it all up, we are not a church or a cult; we are a group of guys bonded together to make ourselves and the world a better place, and to help anyone in need as far as we can, within our power. For me, it has become a lifestyle and something to look forward to. I am happy to say that I have found my niche in becoming a member of the

oldest and largest fraternity in the world. I feel like I am a better person, finding a group of brothers with whom I fit in. I can now help the world be a better place. My wife is also heavily involved in helping the lodge. By working together, we've become a much stronger, better couple. If anyone has any questions or is interested in joining the oldest fraternity in the world, please feel free to contact me or any member of the Masonic Institution.

Ex Companion. Ed Tooma
Capitular District 15

The American Flag: Old Glory

Some interesting facts about the American Flag that you may not be aware of:

Each star represents a state, and the stripes represent the 13 original colonies. The flag of our country was first adopted on June 14, 1777. Since then, it's become an important and inspiring symbol of our country. Aside from its role as an emblem of the United States, the flag has specific rules and specifications for its care and display. When displayed or flown, the flag should never touch the ground. When flown at night, the flag should be illuminated. Flags should never be thrown out or improperly disposed of. If the flag becomes tattered or worn where it's unfit for display, it should be destroyed in a proper fashion, usually by burning.

On June 14th, which is Flag Day, the American Legion and some other groups will have flag-burning ceremonies. How do you handle a soiled flag? Just have it properly dry-cleaned, and it'll be fine to display. If you see a flag flying at half-staff, this represents mourning. By the way, the U.S. flag is only flown at half-staff on land. At sea, it's flown Half-Mast.

To properly bring the flag to half-staff or half-mast, it should first be raised to full-staff, or all the way up the flagpole, then lowered. If you see the flag flown upside down, a distress or an emergency situation is happening. Each state has its own particular flag. When state flags are being flown alongside the American flag, the Stars and Stripes should always be flown above them.

We've all seen someone wearing clothes that resemble the flag, or with the flag embroidered on their jackets, shirts, or caps. Technically, this is disrespect for the flag, although it tends to be overlooked.

Who designed the first American flag? Was it really Betsy Ross? Or was it someone else? Surprisingly, most historians believe it was Francis Hopkinson, who was also a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

[Return to Contents Page](#)

The Virginia Keystone Newsletter - April 2026

The very first American flag had 13 stars in a circle. Its official name was The Betsy Ross Flag.

The 13 stripes on the flag are arranged in this order: 7 Red and 6 White, representing the original 13 colonies.

What do the colors of the stripes mean? White signifies purity and innocence; Red, hardiness and valor; and Blue signifies vigilance, perseverance, and justice.

National Flag sizes:

The 3 Main U.S. Flags used on military installations are:

Storm Flag: 5x9 feet Flown in inclement weather

Post Flag: 8x11 feet Flown daily

Garrison Flag: 20 feet by 38 feet is mainly a holiday flag flown at the Headquarters

Ever wonder how the stars are arranged on the flag:

You have 4 rows of five stars - and 5 rows of 6 stars. Totaling 50 and representing each state.

The American flag, when not in use, should be folded in a triangle.

Have you ever noticed the honor guard when folding the flag? They do it meticulously - folding the American flag 13 times? No, it's not to symbolize the original 13 colonies:

The 1st fold of our flag symbolizes life.

The 2nd fold symbolizes our belief in eternal life.

The 3rd fold is made in honor and remembrance of the veterans who departed our ranks and gave their lives for the defense of our country to attain peace throughout the world.

The 4th fold represents our weaker nature; as American citizens trusting in God, we turn to Him in times of peace as well as in times of war for His divine guidance.

The 5th fold is a tribute to our country, for in the words of Stephen Decatur, "Our Country, in dealing with other countries, may she always be right; but it is still our country, right or wrong.

The 6th fold is for where our hearts lie. It is with our hearts that we pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all.

The 7th fold is a tribute to our Armed Forces, for it is through the Armed Forces that we protect our country and our flag against all her enemies, whether they be found within or without the boundaries of our republic.

The 8th fold is a tribute to the one who entered into the valley of the shadow of death, that we might see the light of day.

The 9th fold is a tribute to womanhood and Mothers. For it has been through their faith, their love, loyalty, and devotion that the character of the men and women who have made this country great has been molded.

The 10th fold is a tribute to the father, for he, too, has given his sons and daughters for the defense of our country since they were first born.

The Virginia Keystone Newsletter - April 2026

The 11th fold represents the lower portion of the seal of King David and King Solomon and, in the Hebrews' eyes, glorifies the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The 12th fold represents an emblem of eternity and glorifies, in the Christians eyes, God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The 13th fold, or when the flag is completely folded, the stars are uppermost, reminding us of our nation's motto, "In God We Trust."

After the flag is completely folded and tucked in, it takes on the appearance of a triangle, or cocked hat, ever reminding us of the soldiers who served under General George Washington, and the Sailors and Marines who served under Captain John Paul Jones, who were followed by their comrades and shipmates in the Armed Forces of the United States, preserving for us the rights, privileges and freedoms we enjoy today. The original Pledge of Allegiance to Old Glory was written in 1885 by Captain George Thatcher Balch, a Union Army officer in the Civil War. In 1892, Francis Bellamy, a Freemason and minister, revised Balch's pledge, which is largely the same one adopted by Congress in 1945. Here are some versions of the Pledge of Allegiance.

1892 (first version)[1]

"I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

1892 to 1923 (early revision by Bellamy)[2]

"I pledge allegiance to my Flag and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

1923 to 1924[3]

"I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

1924 to 1954[3]

"I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States **of America** and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

1954 (current version, per 4 U.S.C. §4)[4]

"I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation **under God**, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

If you enjoyed reading this, why not use it as a program at a Chapter, or Craft Lodge? You can also use bits and pieces for trivia purposes.