

Grand Lodge of Nebraska



The Newcomer's Guide to Masonry

**Grand Lodge of Nebraska
March 2021 Revised**

Welcome to Masonry

As Grand Master of the Grand Lodge A.:F.: & A.:M.: of Nebraska, I would like to welcome you as a new brother to our great fraternity! Becoming a Master Mason is an honor not afforded to every man and you should be proud that you are now among some of the leading men of your community and of history.

As a newcomer to Freemasonry, you may be bewildered by all the information that has been presented to you up to this point. While you'll learn a great deal about Freemasonry by talking to your lodge brothers and participating in lodge meetings and events, you'd probably like to learn the basics as soon as possible. That's the purpose of this guide.

We hope this guide will serve as an educational foundation for your Masonic career, and that it will provide you a better understanding of our craft, your lodge, and the great opportunities in front of you.

Again, congratulations on becoming a Master Mason, and welcome to the Fraternity. You stand at the entrance of a wonderful and rewarding journey!

Sincerely and Fraternally,

Grand Master of Masons in Nebraska

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Regular Communications

A Regular Communication (business meeting) of a lodge occurs once a month as determined by its bylaws. At least eight of a lodge's members must present to form the quorum (a minimum number) necessary to conduct business. Generally, this should consist of the Master, Wardens, Secretary and Treasurer (in some lodges, this is the same person), Deacons, and Stewards.

Lodge tradition, its bylaws, and the will and pleasure of the Master largely dictates the order of business during a Regular Communication. Typically, a Regular Communication will consist of:

- approving the minutes
- reading any correspondence
- discussing and conducting unfinished business
- reading and approving bills, not contained in the lodge budget
- presenting the Treasurer's report
- presenting reports of other committees
- discussing and conducting other new business
- introducing guests
- reading and balloting on petitions

Special Communications

A Special Communication is usually a lodge meeting called by the Master to confer a degree upon a candidate, though it may occasionally be used for other purposes. Lodge business cannot be taken up or acted upon at a Special Communication.

Opening and Closing Lodge

All meetings of a Masonic lodge must be open in *due form*. Opening a lodge consists of:

- ensuring the doors are closed
- verifying that everyone in the room is a Mason of the proper degree
- ensuring that at least eight Masons from the lodge present
- ensuring that the Tyler is where he's supposed to be
- reciting the duties of a Mason of the particular degree being opened
- praying to a Supreme Being
- declaring the lodge open
- displaying the Great Lights of Masonry

Masonic Etiquette and Protocol

Like many organizations, Masonry has a system of etiquette and protocol. The system is complicated, with many rules, and many exceptions to those rules. The basics, however, are straightforward. The following are a few simple rules to remember at every regular and special communication.

Criticism

There is much to be learned in Freemasonry: rituals, lectures, floorwork, and the duties of an officer, just to name a few. This may cause you some anxiety, because, too often in society, people are criticized and made to feel ashamed for doing anything wrong, or making even the smallest error.

Fortunately, that is not the case in Freemasonry. We are all brothers and “on the level.” Criticism by other brothers will always be given in a friendly and constructive manner that is intended only to help you get better at whatever you are attempting to learn. If someone in lodge corrects you about something you think is insignificant, like turning left when you should have turned right, please keep in mind that he is *not* complaining. His only intent is to help you improve at whatever it is you are attempting to learn.

Attire

Remember, we are proud to be Masons. Most lodges expect their members to dress in business attire, such as dark blazer and grey slacks, or a business suit. While casual dress is acceptable for ritual practices and informal gatherings, you should not wear jeans, shorts, t-shirts, or flip-flops to a regular or special meeting. Certain lodges are more, or less, formal than others. For example, at least one lodge in Nebraska requires tuxedo, while another requires bib-overalls.

When wearing a suit coat, the apron should be worn on the outside or over the garment.

Moving About the Lodge

There are certain ritualistic duties you must perform upon entering or retiring from a lodge. Prior to your first lodge meeting, please take some time to ask a brother to teach you what those duties are.

Never walk between the altar and the East when the lodge is tyled (i.e., when a regular or special communication is underway, and the Tyler has been posted outside the lodge room). The Master of the lodge needs to have an intimate connection with that Great Light of Masonry, which serves to remind him that he is subservient to the Great Architect of the Universe.

Speaking in Lodge

If you want to speak during a meeting, do the following: stand up, wait for the Master to acknowledge you, and speak directly to him. Standing lets the Master know you want to speak. This is standard meeting decorum in all regular lodges (occasionally, someone may skirt around this particular rule, but doing so is rude to the Master). The Master controls every aspect of the meeting, so only he can allow you to speak.

You should always address the Master, even if you’re commenting on something someone else said, or asking a question of someone other than the Master. This may sound odd, but it is a sign of respect and allows the meeting to run smoothly. You can ask the Master to address the brethren or a specific brother if you choose, but again, it is all at the Master’s will and pleasure. He only has the job for a year, and you might be going up there soon!

Sidebar Discussions

Refrain from chatting in an open meeting. Sometimes people want to catch up on things. Maybe someone hasn’t seen a good friend in quite some time. This is very intrusive to a meeting and disruptive to a degree going on, so do your part in limiting this as much as possible. Sometimes there’s no stopping certain brothers, but don’t contribute yourself.

Use of Electronic Devices

The use of cellular phones or other electronic devices designed for texting, audio recording, video recording or photography is strictly forbidden in a tyled lodge. Cellular phones should be shut off or placed in a silent mode prior to entering a tyled lodge. No calls should be made or answered, nor text messages received or sent under any circumstances.

If a brother expects, or has the possibility of receiving an urgent/emergency call or message, he should leave the lodge room, using proper protocol, before answering/retrieving the call or message. Electronic PDA's or Calendars may be used at the appropriate time to enter or retrieve important dates relative to lodge business, during a tyled lodge meeting.

Failure of a brother to comply may result in the brother being escorted from the lodge room, with re-admittance at the discretion of the Master only.

Food and Drink

Food and drink are not permitted within the lodge room.

Use of Ciphers

Never bring a Cipher to a tyled lodge meeting – they are not permitted. They may, however, be used for practicing ritual prior to, or following, a tyled lodge meeting.

Religious and Political Discussions

Religion and politics are never discussed in lodge.

Masonic Offenses

Masons are governed by a Constitution and bylaws of the Grand Lodge of Nebraska, in addition to the bylaws of their respective lodges. Masonic offenses (i.e., actions prohibited by the Constitution or Bylaws) and the processes for trying a Masonic offense are contained in the Constitution and Bylaws of the Grand Lodge of Nebraska (Part 3, Discipline). Your lodge Secretary should have a copy of the Constitution and bylaws that you can read. It is important to make yourself familiar with this section so that you do not accidentally commit an offense.

Lodge Organization

Grand Lodge

A "Grand Lodge" is the supreme body of Freemasonry for a particular geographic area. With minor differences, each territorial Grand Lodge is independent, autonomous, and sovereign. They are responsible for administering the lodges within their jurisdiction. There is no central worldwide authority governing all Freemasonry, but each Grand Lodge, in order to be recognized as 'regular' by others, must maintain minimum acceptable standards. This ensures adherence to established 'basic principles,' recognition, and the continuity of many cherished traditions and practices.

In the United States, every state has its own Grand Lodge. Each Grand Lodge is a sovereign body, meaning that no other Masonic organization can dictate its actions. The Grand Lodge consists of specially-elected Grand Lodge officers, Past Grand Masters, and Worshipful Masters, Senior Wardens, Junior Wardens, and Secretaries of each subordinate body. It has the power to enforce the **Constitution and Bylaws** in its jurisdiction and make decisions on what other Grand Lodges in the world it will recognize as being "regular." Changing of the **Constitution and Bylaws** can only be done by the membership of the Grand Lodge at the Annual Communication by vote of the entire body.

The Grand Lodge of Nebraska was founded in 1857, formed from three subordinate lodges hailing from three other Grand Lodges: Nebraska Lodge No. 184 (chartered from the Grand Lodge of Illinois), Giddings Lodge No. 156 (chartered from the Grand Lodge of Missouri) and Capitol Lodge No. 101 (chartered from the Grand Lodge of Iowa).

The officers of a Grand Lodge are either elected or appointed, and each has certain administrative or ceremonial duties or responsibilities as outlined in the Code or Constitution and bylaws of the particular Grand Lodge, or as dictated by Masonic tradition.

The head of the Grand Lodge is the Grand Master. He is the highest officer and supreme authority of Freemasonry in the state. In general, any orders he gives concerning Masonic activities or functions are absolute. He is accorded the highest respect in the state and is always the last speaker at any event. His title, and the title of any Past Grand Master, is "Most Worshipful Brother."

The Deputy Grand Master assists the Grand Master in the discharge of his duties. His title is "Right Worshipful Brother." He is elected as Deputy Grand Master and Grand Master-elect, which means that he will automatically become Grand Master the year after he is Deputy Grand Master.

The Grand Senior and Junior Wardens are also elected officers of the Grand Lodge, and are traditionally elected to the next position in line. Their titles are also each "Right Worshipful Brother."

Once each year, the Grand Lodge meets in *Annual Communication*, which is a business meeting held usually in the city of Kearney. This meeting officially takes place on the first Friday of February, but includes the preceding Thursday and following Saturday. While only the Grand Lodge officers, Past Grand Masters, and the Masters, Wardens, and Secretaries from the subordinate lodges have a vote, it is open to all Master Masons. A quorum for this meeting consists of delegates from at least eight subordinate lodges. Visitors from around the world are welcomed and introduced to the brethren present.

Local ("Blue") Lodges

A lodge is the oldest and most basic organization in Freemasonry. They are sometimes called 'Blue' or 'Craft' lodges. It is believed the term *lodge* comes from the lodges (shelters) constructed at the building sites of cathedrals and castles during the Middle Ages. Masons worked and lived in these shelters.

While lodges do perform routine business duties (review petitions for membership, general and charitable fund accounts, subscriptions, donations, etc.), a lodge's primary function is to conduct the initiatory rituals and ceremonies required for a successful petitioner to become a Mason, and to then teach him Freemasonry's moral message.

Freemasonry's moral message promotes natural equality, dependence on one another, benevolence, intellectual truth, inevitable death, and fidelity, under God. Freemasonry communicates its moral teachings through ritual dramas, performed by members of a lodge, that incorporate the ancient stonemasons' customs and tools.

In general, a lodge operates as a democracy where each Master Mason has one vote on all matters that pertain to that lodge. However, each lodge is governed not only by its own bylaws but also by the Grand Lodge's ***Constitution and Bylaws***.

Lodge Officers

Every lodge is required to have a Worshipful Master, a Senior Warden, a Junior Warden, a Senior Deacon, a Junior Deacon, a Treasurer, and a Secretary. However, Freemasons do not march in lockstep with one another. There are subtle and not-so-subtle differences in the names of officers and their duties, from country to country, as well as from state to state. Nevertheless, a Mason from Nebraska visiting in any other jurisdiction (American, European, South America, etc.) will recognize the same basic governing framework of the Masonic officer's line that he had at home in Nebraska.

The head of a lodge is an officer called the "Worshipful Master." "Worshipful" means "highly respected" or "honored." The term was inherited from the judicial system of England and has no religious implication. "Master" means "leader" or "best qualified," as in "Concert Master" or "Master Architect." French Masons use the word "venerable" for their Masters, which as much the same meaning.

Each officer of a lodge has a title that originated during the Middle Ages. These titles may vary somewhat from state to state, our country to country, but, in general, the officers and their contemporary equivalents are:

Title of Masonic Officer	Contemporary, Non-Masonic Equivalent	Title of Masonic Officer	Contemporary, Non-Masonic Equivalent
Worshipful Master	President	Marshal	Master of
Senior Warden	1st Vice President	Deacons	Messenger
Junior Warden	2nd Vice President	Stewards	Page
Treasurer	Financial Officer	Tyler	Door Keeper
Secretary	Recorder	Chaplain	Chaplain

The Master of the Lodge

By the authority granted him by the Grand Lodge, each Master formally convenes a lodge's regular meetings through his Secretary. The Master has some discretion regarding what business is transacted at each lodge meeting, but he must comply with the bylaws of the lodge and the Grand Lodge's Constitution and bylaws.

Though the Grand Lodge has made a guide available, the Master of a lodge has some flexibility in regard to the order in which he presents business items, the wording used to perform some of the functions (introduction of guests, assigning duties to officers, assigning projects to officers, etc.), and the level of order maintained during the meeting.

However, all ceremonies and rituals must be conducted strictly in accordance with the standards prescribed by the Grand Custodian. . This ensures that rituals are performed in an identical manner throughout the Grand Jurisdiction.

From the point of view of legislation, neither Master nor lodge has any absolute authority, since no amendment to the lodge bylaws can be effective until it has been approved by a higher authority. (i.e., Grand Master). The Grand Master's approval will not be given to any amendment to the lodge bylaws which are at odds with the Grand Lodge ***Book of Constitution and Bylaws***.

Any man, regardless of his social, business, or economic position outside the lodge room, may aspire to be Master of his lodge.

Elections and Appointments of Lodge Officers

Customarily, Masons who are already officers will advance from their current office (chair) to the next most senior chair the following year. This is called "going through the chairs." This constitutes what is called the progressive or advancing line, or the line of succession.

This means that, in a perfect scenario, a man who appointed as Junior Steward will progress through the chairs to become the lodge's Master seven years later. Although this curious plan for leadership has its drawbacks, it is based on the philosophy of equality among Masons. The progressive line is most common in the United States, but it exists in many other jurisdictions, as well. Note, however, that this is an unwritten tradition, and that all Master Masons are

eligible for any lodge office, regardless of whether they are in the advancing or progressive line.

A consistent progressive line helps a lodge avoid the types of issues that might occur if its Masons had to compete against one another for officer positions. It also frees each Mason in the line from the burden of having to campaign, which in turn allows him to instead focus on learning each position's duties and role in the Masonic ceremonies. By the time he becomes Master of the lodge, he will have sat in every chair except, perhaps, the Secretary or Treasurer. In doing so, he will have learned many valuable skills, to include public speaking, management of a volunteer organization, decorum, and leadership.

The progression used in Nebraska and many other jurisdictions is as follows:

- Junior Steward Appointed
- Senior Steward Appointed
- Junior Deacon Appointed
- Senior Deacon Appointed
- Junior Warden Elected
- Senior Warden Elected
- Worshipful Master Elected

The following officers are not in the progressive line, though Masons serving in these roles might, under certain circumstances, move into the progressive line:

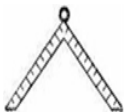
- Secretary Elected
- Treasurer Elected
- Chaplain Appointed
- Marshal Appointed
- Tyler Appointed
- Organist Appointed

Masonic Jewels, Titles, and Roles

In 15th century England, under the reign of King Edward III, local (or what we now call *municipal*) governments grew out of the merchant and craft guilds of the towns. The guilds had lots of money and property, as well as organizational and administrative experience. Heads of the guilds became heads of town councils, mayors, sheriffs, and more.

One manner in which an official proclaimed his rank was by wearing a badge of office, or jewel, on a chain around his neck – a practice that survives today. Lodges perpetuate this tradition, using Masonic symbols as jewels.

Worshipful Master



The Worshipful Master's jewel is the **Square**, which is a stonemason's tool to ascertain whether the angles of a cut and smoothed stone are true and correct. It is not a measuring square, like carpenters use. Because it is used to ensure an angle is "true," this jewel symbolizes virtue.

The Worshipful Master of a Masonic lodge is the highest-ranked officer. His position is similar to that of a president or chairman of other organizations.

The Worshipful Master sits in the east, symbolic of the rising sun, and presides over the lodge. The Master is said to be "in the east" even when a lodge building's orientation prohibits from being *physically* in the east. While serving his term as Master, he has the final word regarding the actions of the lodge. He is also responsible, as the ritual

instructs, for “setting the Craft to work and giving them good and wholesome instruction for their labor.”

The Worshipful Master is responsible for everything that occurs within his lodge during his year as Master. He is ultimately responsible for every other lodge officer and their duties, every lodge committee, ritual and degree work, Masonic education, social functions, fundraisers and Grand Lodge liaison, Trestle Board communication, etc.

All eyes are upon the Master. If lodge functions go smoothly, it is the Master who takes the credit. If lodge functions go awry, it is the Master who bears the blame.

It is his duty to preside over business meetings, the conferral of degrees, and delegation of duties to all other lodge Officers.

Senior Warden



The Senior Warden's jewel is the **Level**, a stonemason's instrument used to check the levelness of horizontal surfaces. It symbolizes that all Masons meet on the level, without regard to social, political, or religious status.

The Senior Warden sits in the west, symbolic of the setting sun, and assists the Worshipful Master in opening and closing the lodge. He is the second in command, like the vice president, and if the Master is unable, he may open and conduct business. His ancient duties were to pay the Craft their wages and to handle disputes among the workers. These days, he's just a heartbeat away from the East, so his task is to support the Master and to prepare himself for that office the following year.

The Senior Warden (and the Junior Warden) have small wooden columns on the pedestals in front of their positions. When the lodge is at work (during a tyled meeting), the Senior Warden's column stands upright, and the Junior Warden's column is laid on its side, showing that the Senior Warden is now in charge of the Craftsmen. When the work is concluded and the lodge retires to refreshment, the Junior Warden's column is raised, and the Senior Warden's is laid down, showing that the Craftsmen are now under the supervision of the Junior Warden. When the lodge is closed, both columns will be laid down.

Junior Warden



The Junior Warden's jewel is the **Plumb**, a stonemason's instrument used for checking the alignment of a vertical surface. It symbolizes upright behavior among Masons.

The Junior Warden sits in the south, symbolic of the position of the sun at midday. Because he represents the sun at lunchtime, he metaphorically supervises the Craftsmen when they're at recess, or refreshment. He is the number-three officer in the lodge hierarchy, and he may open the lodge if the Master and Senior Warden are unavailable. The Master and the two elected Wardens (the Senior Warden and the Junior Warden) are the only officers who may open a meeting. Only a Grand Master may override this requirement.

The Junior Warden is often in charge of arranging meals for the lodge, and the Stewards traditionally act as his assistants. One of the Junior Warden's symbolic jobs, described in the ritual, is to make certain that the members “do not convert (their) refreshment into intemperance or excess.” In most U.S. jurisdictions, alcohol is barred from the lodge, but the ceremonial reference to an earlier era remains part of the Junior Warden's job description. Technically, alcohol may be permitted in a lodge building so long as no youth groups meet there and no tyled meeting is open. This opens up the possibility of serving wine with a meal, or perhaps hosting a smoker with refreshments available. However, alcohol may not be stored in a lodge building where youth group meetings are regularly held.

Senior Deacon



The Senior Deacon's jewel is a **Square and Compass**, with a **sun** in the middle. The sun signifies that his position is in the east, with the Master. In other parts of the world, the jewels worn on the collars of the Deacons may be a dove and their rods might be topped by a figure of Mercury or a dove with an olive branch.

The Senior Deacon sits to the right of the Worshipful Master. He is the Master's messenger and it is his duty to carry orders from the Worshipful Master to the Senior Warden or elsewhere about the lodge as instructed. He does a lot of walking. He welcomes and escorts both visitors and new candidates into the lodge and usually introduces distinguished visitors. During degree rituals, he is the guide for the new candidate, conducting him around the lodge room. In the opening and closing ceremonies of the lodge, the Senior Deacon opens and closes the Bible, and lights or extinguishes the lights at the altar. He also carries the ballot box around the room when new members are balloted on.

Both Senior and Junior Deacons carry long staffs, or rods. Because they are messengers of the lodge, the rods they carry are symbolic of the caduceus, or wand, carried by Mercury, the Roman winged god and messenger. The rods are topped by their jewels of office, which is the same as the jewels on their collars.

Junior Deacon



The Junior Deacon's jewel of office is the **Square and Compass** with a **crescent moon** above the square. The moon signifies that his position is in the west.

The Junior Deacon sits to the right of the Senior Warden. He is the messenger of the Senior Warden, and carries messages to the Junior Warden or elsewhere about the lodge as instructed. He is also the inner guard. It is his job to be certain the Tyler is guarding the door on the outside, and to allow the entry of Masons who have been properly vouched for. He and the Tyler communicate with each other by knocking back and forth on either side of the closed door. After a lodge is opened, it is the Junior Deacon's responsibility to inform anyone entering it who has control of the door (either the Worshipful Master or Senior Warden), and in which degree the lodge is opened.

Senior and Junior Stewards



The Stewards' jewels are the same: a **Cornucopia**, or "horn of plenty," symbolizing — what else? — lots of food. Masons love to eat and will find any excuse they can to have a breakfast, luncheon, or dinner to commemorate just about anything. The cornucopia represents a goat horn filled with the fresh fruits and vegetables. It denotes the "fruits of your labors" and represents a job well done.

The Stewards are the Junior Warden's assistants, and they help set up the lodge room. They prepare all new candidates before entering the lodge for their degree rituals, and escort them to the lodge room, where the Senior Deacon takes over. In some lodges, they may also be the officers in charge of refreshments before or after a meeting. The Stewards, like the Deacons, carry rods, emulating the rod used by England's Lord High Steward's in the House of Lords. The rods are also topped with the jewels of their offices.

Treasurer



The Treasurer's jewel is a **Pair of Crossed Keys**, signifying the keys to a cashbox. This identifies him as the collector and distributor of all lodge funds. The Treasurer of a Masonic lodge is the Chief Financial Officer of the lodge. He sits to the right of the Master in the East.

The Treasurer is responsible for all financial transactions. He receives all money, pays all debts by order of the Worshipful Master with the consent of the lodge, and renders a report when requested.

The Treasurer does not need to have an accounting degree, but experience with bookkeeping and accounting is an asset. Financial bookkeeping transactions may be performed either by hand or by the use of accounting software.



Secretary

The Secretary's jewel is the **Crossed Quill Pens** because he is the lodge's Recorder. The Secretary's duties require a high degree of lodge experience, Masonic knowledge, diplomacy and, above all, detailed paperwork skills.

The Secretary is the backbone of any Masonic lodge and holds a position of great responsibility. He sits to the left of the Master in the East.

His duties require him to handle all correspondence, minutes of lodge meetings, and petitions of new candidates. He also maintains a roster of lodge members, submits timely reports to the Grand Lodge, compiles and maintains a list of new candidates and the degrees conferred on those candidates. He also sends out annual dues notices and receives dues payments, communicates with other lodges and the Grand Lodge, writes letters, retrieves the mail, and handles many other administrative duties.

The Secretary's lodge officer must be well versed in Grand Lodge ***Constitution and Bylaws*** for his jurisdiction, in addition to his lodge's bylaws.

A very experienced member usually resides in this chair...many times he is a Past Master of the lodge.

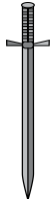
Marshal



The Marshal's jewel is the **Crossed Batons**. The Marshal is the lodge's Conductor or Master of Ceremonies. He is an optional officer, i.e., not all lodges have a Marshal.

The Marshal's principal role is the organization of processions and ensuring the correct precedence and etiquette in formal proceedings. It is his duty to formally conduct visitors into the lodge and introduce them to the members when the lodge is in session.

Tyler



The Tyler's jewel is the **Sword**, by which he symbolically refuses entrance to anyone who is not duly qualified to enter the lodge, and who has the Master's permission to do so. The sword has no scabbard, as it is his symbolic duty to always have his sword drawn, ready for the defense of his post. The Tyler is sometimes known as the "Outer Guard." His position is outside the lodge room door.

The Tyler guards against cowans and eavesdroppers. In the Middle Ages, a *cowan* was a man who built stone walls of poor quality. He was an uninitiated or non-apprenticed stonemason. An eavesdropper was one who stood without the door or window of the lodge and tried to hear what was transpiring inside in hopes of learning the 'secrets' of the lodge or Masonry in general.

After the lodge members are inside the lodge room, the door closes and it is the Tyler's duty to decide whether late arrivals may enter. It is also his duty to make sure that each visitor is "properly clothed," which means they must be wearing a Masonic apron.

The Tyler is sometimes called upon to assist in the preparation of candidates.

Chaplain



The Chaplain's jewel is an **Open Book**, symbolizing the Volume of Sacred Law (the Christian Bible, Hebrew Torah or Tanakh, the Muslim Qur'an, the Hindu Vedas or other Holy Books).

The Chaplain of a Masonic lodge sits to the left of the Master in the East. He is the spiritual leader of the lodge, though he may or may not be a real-world Minister, Priest, Rabbi or Imam. In fact, most Chaplains have no religious training and prayers are non-

denominational. The Chaplain is responsible for non-denominational prayers at both the opening and closing of meetings, during degree ritual ceremonies, and before meals.



Musician

The musician's jewel is the **lyre**, which represents music. It is the Musician's duty to accompany certain portions of the opening and closing with music. He also plays at specific times during the conferral of degrees as well as at officer installations. Not every lodge has a Musician; some use recorded music.

Masonic Secrets

Non-Masons often refer to Freemasonry as a *secret society*. This is inaccurate. Masons publicly display their insignia, the Square and Compass, on their lodge buildings, vehicles, clothing, hats, rings, coffee cups, and calling cards. They conduct public cornerstone laying ceremonies, host public charity events, and perform Masonic Funerals and Memorial services, all of which are open to the public. Further, the dates, times, and locations of Masonic meetings and events are usually posted on the internet for the world to see.

Consequently, Masonry cannot accurately be labeled a *secret society*. It is, instead, a *society with secrets*. Unfortunately, in the past, the mere fact that the fraternity had secrets was used as evidence that Freemasons were plotting against the political and religious status quo. Even today, the fraternity's secrets are often viewed with suspicion. A question sometimes asked of Freemasons is, "If you're not doing anything wrong, why are you keeping secrets?"

As society advanced, the selective ability to keep some information confidential became important. Everyone knows someone who cannot keep a secret and who does not merit their trust. The safekeeping of certain secrets is one of the first duties to which a man who becomes a Mason agrees. Learning how to keep the secrets of a brother Mason, or of the Fraternity as a whole, teaches a man to respect the property of others. It also demonstrates to others that a man merits the trust and confidence of his fellow Masons. The various Masonic penalties, although symbolic, are a reminder of the seriousness of the undertakings and a re-enforcement in the mental toughness to carry them out.

Masonic secrecy is not a pointless exercise. Instead, it unites the Craft, benefits the individual members, and gives greater weight to those secret things Masonry teaches. Because the teaching and maintenance of secrets are difficult, Masons are compelled to find new ways to learn and retain information. Through this process, they increase their mental discipline.

In summary, Masonic secrecy is not merely an ancient tradition. It is, instead, a vital characteristic of the fraternity that must be cherished and protected. No less than the democratic tradition of the secret ballot, Masons should be prepared to defend their right and duty to keep the secrets which are uniquely theirs, and to pass them on to future Masons.

Learning Ritual

Throughout all three degrees, you were instructed by beautiful lectures and ceremonies. Although the idea of memorizing all of this material may seem daunting, with a little work and coaching, most people can learn the ritual.

Originally, the tradition of Masonry was to team up with a proficient Master Mason, to learn the questions and answers, lectures, or the conferring of degrees. That was in the days of no television, no sports, and no other major distractions of a person's private life. It was not a problem for two Masons to get together and work on memorizing a lecture, answers, etc. Today, with time in short supply, it is more difficult to have two schedules that will allow this type of work. To solve this problem, learning aids were devised by the Grand Lodge. Teaming up with a proficient Master Mason is still necessary, but at an often reduced time requirement.

The Grand Lodge of Nebraska publishes two books to be used in the learning of the ritual of the degrees. They are the Monitor and the Cipher. Because each Grand Jurisdiction's wording of the degrees is different, using other jurisdictions publications is not possible.

The Monitor contains the non-esoteric parts of the degree lectures, in addition to the opening & closing prayers, charges, explanations of the working tools, and circumambulation prayers. This book can be used in a tyled lodge to prompt anyone who is giving a lecture or another part of the degree work. It is recommended that this is used only as a prompting tool in open lodge, and not used to be read to the new candidates.

The Cipher contains both the esoteric and non-esoteric portions of the three degrees, to include the opening and closing ritual and rituals for the conferring of the degrees. However, all esoteric work is written in code to protect the work from the profane. The code consists of symbols and/or only a few letters of each word.

The Cipher is used to help a Mason learn the lectures or the esoteric parts of the degrees. It is necessary that the reader have an idea of what the ritual words are, before they can interpret the code. Thus, it will be necessary to work with a proficient Master Mason to learn the work. The Cipher is never to be used in a tyled lodge and should not be in the possession of a Mason when in a tyled lodge.

Education

In lodge, we listen to lectures describing or expanding upon what was presented in the degrees, but often the symbols and allegories pass over our heads because there is so much information presented in a short period of time.

Gaining a thorough understanding of Freemasonry requires that you pursue educational opportunities beyond the lectures. Fortunately, there are many avenues available to you.

The most easily accessible resource is your lodge brothers, many of whom have a detailed understanding of Masonry and who are always available to answer questions. There are also education presentations during most Regular communications, and lodges offer a variety of methods to learn degree work, to include "round tables." You will also learn more about Masonry by simply attending lodge regularly, visiting other lodges, and attending Grand Lodge functions. Involvement is a great teacher.

There are also a vast number of books and websites available for self-study. The following books are recommended for your consideration:

Reading Recommendations

- *Freemasons for Dummies* by Christopher Hodapp ISBN-0-7645-9796-5
- *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Freemasonry* by PHD. S Brent Morris ISBN-1-5925-7490-4
- *Freemasonry: An Introduction* by Mark E. Koltko-Rivera ISBN 978-0980104202
- *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia* by Henry Wilson Coil ISBN-0-88053-054-5
- *Freemasonry – A Journey Through Ritual and Symbol* by W K MacNulty ISBN 0 500 81037 0
- *The Newly-Made Mason* by H.L. Haywood ISBN-0-88053-030-8
- *Introduction to Freemasonry* by Carl H Claudy.
- *Born in Blood - The Lost Secrets of Freemasonry* by John J. Robinson ISBN-0-871316-021
- *The Temple and the Lodge* by Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh ISBN-1-559701-269

- *A Pilgrim's Path - Freemasonry and the Religious Right* by John J. Robinson ISBN-0-871317-32X
- *Freemasonry in American History* by Allen E. Roberts ISBN-0-88053-078-2
- *Beneath the Stone* by C. Bruce Hunter ISBN-1-56664-147-0
- *A House Undivided* by Allen E. Roberts ISBN-0-88053-056-1
- *Revolutionary Brotherhood - Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order* by Steven C. Bullock ISBN-0-807822-825
- *G. Washington: Master Mason* by Allen Roberts ISBN 0-88053-060
- *Sesquicentennial History Book* by Russell G. Reno ISBN 978-0-88053-199-3
- *Solomon's Memory Palace* by Bob Lingerfelt ISBN-13: 978-1977094681
- *150 Famous Masons Book* by John T. Parsons ISBN 978-0-88053-198-6

Website Recommendations

1. Nebraska Masonic Education

<http://www.nebraskamasoniceducation.com>

This website provides a good source of honest and forthright information about Masonry. The first section of the website is the Course Catalog. Contained within this section is a candidate education section, created to give additional information to the newly initiated, newly passed, and newly raised Mason. The following sections contain articles of Masonic subjects that give even further information about the Fraternity. The discussion forum on this website has brought about some lively participation. Once an individual registers, they are allowed to participate in the discussions about Masonry or any topic related to Masonry. The Masonic Resource section provides a list of books and website that will provide accurate information for Masonic research. Included in the lists is the annual Masonic Education Breakfast *Recommended Reading* books announced every year at the Grand Lodge Annual Communication.

2. Masonic Renewal Committee

<http://masonicrenewal.org>

The Online Library allows users to browse, read, and download texts from the largest and continuously growing digital Masonic Library. The Development Programs section of this site provides a searchable database of the collective innovation of Masons from around the world as they strive to improve their lodges, grand lodges and appendant bodies. Search through thousands of high-resolution images to beautify lodges, presentations, show others the immaculate architecture of Masonic temple's and much more. The Podcast Section gives the user the ability to download and listen to lectures covering a wide range of Masonic topics. The Videos Section contains videos of a wide variety of Masonic topics.

3. The Masonic Society

<http://www.themasonicsociety.com>

This is the Masonic Society Website. The Masonic Society leadership is made up of North America's movers and shakers in Masonry. This site contains information about events in Masonry, in addition to information about their publications, *The Masonic Society Journal*. The publication's editor is Christopher Hodapp, author of the book "Freemasons for Dummies." The *Forum* Section provides you an opportunity to read and share the ideas and opinions with other Masons around the world. The *Masonic Calendar* highlights Masonic happenings in the United States.

4. Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry

<http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com>

Here you'll discover fascinating articles and papers about Freemasonry from around the world in several languages, in addition to puzzles, games, and much more. This is a must-visit site for Masons seeking more Light.

5. Anti-Masonry Points of View

<http://www.masonicinfo.com>

Don't be dissuaded by the name however. It is not promoting anti-Masonry. Instead, it addresses many of the negative things said about Masonry. The search function is helpful in obtaining information about Masonic symbols, famous Masons, and other topics of interest.

6. Masonic Research Network

www.researchmasonry.com

This is the homepage of the Masonic Research Network, a social network of Masonic educators hosted by Sioux City Scottish Rite. It is open to qualified Masons. The Masonic Research Network includes historical, esoteric, philosophical, and symbolic publications mostly published before 1917. It includes an online forum, to encourage discussion on Masonic Education.

7. Grand Lodge of Nebraska

www.glne.org

Here you will find valuable information about being a Mason, running a lodge, and what Masonic activities are going on in Nebraska.

Appendant Bodies

After being raised, a Master Mason may choose to join any number of Masonic appendant bodies. The most common appendant orders are the Scottish Rite, York Rite, and Shrine. It is highly recommended that the newly raised Master Mason wait for an appropriate period and concentrate on perfecting his Blue Lodge skills prior to joining one or more of the appendant or concordant bodies, but there is no rule or regulation to prevent him from doing so immediately upon being raised.

Below is a list of the major Masonic appendant bodies active in Nebraska.

Scottish Rite

The Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite (AASR) is an additional system of degrees dating to the 19th century which are designed to add further light to one's ancient craft Blue Lodge experience. The Scottish Rite is divided into four interrelated bodies, each of which deals with the recovery and meaning of the true Word of a Master Mason. The Scottish Rite system progresses through 33°, but it is accepted that the highest degree in Masonry is and will always remain the third degree. Thus, the Scottish Rite degrees are properly called additional degrees, rather than higher degrees.



York Rite

The York Rite is a confederation of three independent Masonic bodies: Royal Arch Chapter, Cryptic Council, and Knights Templar Commandery. The Royal Arch deals with the recovery and meaning of the true Word of a Master Mason. The Chapter confers four degrees.



The Degree of Royal Arch Mason is often described as the most spiritual and mystical of all the degrees of Freemasonry. The Royal Arch is also known as a "gateway" degree, and membership entitles one to join certain smaller rites and orders, such as the Allied

Masonic Degrees, Knights Masons USA, Red Cross of Constantine, and so on. The Cryptic Council confers three degrees, which help explain how the true secrets of a Master Mason were safeguarded until the time when future ages should discover the light. The Knights Templar Commandery is the third body of the York Rite. It is Christian in character and content, and describes the passage of pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem during the Crusades.

Shrine

Master Masons are also eligible to join the Shrine, a benevolent and social organization. The Shrine is particularly well known for the many hospitals it maintains for the care of children. This care is offered to all children in need at no cost to them or their families. It is supported by donations of the members of that body and covers the cost above the insurance coverage, when the patient is covered. No child is rejected due to lack of insurance or funds to pay.



Other Masonic Bodies

There are other rites, degrees, and organizations one may join or be invited to join upon becoming a Master Mason, depending on one's interests in charity, fellowship, or further light in Masonry.

Prince Hall Freemasonry

This is a branch of North American Freemasonry founded by Prince Hall in the 18th century and composed predominantly of African Americans. Prince Hall Masonry, is considered regular (not clandestine) by the majority of North America's mainstream Grand Lodges (including Nebraska), but not all jurisdictions.



National Sojourners

National Sojourners is a Masonic organization consisting mostly of active and prior-service military personnel, although non-prior service Master Masons may be permitted as a small percentage of the total membership. Their purpose is social and patriotic, geared toward supporting our Nation and its military establishment. National Sojourners presently confers only a single degree, that of Hero of '76.



Order of the Eastern Star

The Order of the Eastern Star, is a popular concordant body, admitting both men and women. Often, it provides the opportunity for a husband and wife to share in the fraternal experience together. There are a number of other Masonic organizations and clubs, such as Order of the Amaranth, and White Shrine of Jerusalem, but the new Mason is cautioned to make certain that they are recognized and approved by their Grand Lodge before joining them, as some are defined as "irregular" or "clandestine," and membership in them could jeopardize your Masonic status.



Masonic Youth Organizations

There are also three Masonic youth orders in Nebraska, which include boys and girls (and young men and young women) in the family of Freemasonry:

DeMolay International

Young men from ages 12 to 21 are eligible. This organization teaches young men to live in accordance with the seven core values of filial love, reverence for sacred things, courtesy, comradeship, fidelity, cleanness, and patriotism.



Job's Daughters International

Young ladies from 10 to 20, who are related to or sponsored by a Master Mason are eligible and believe in a higher power. It is a premier organization for young women that teaches the values of leadership, public speaking, charity, respect for parents and elders, and teamwork.



Order of the Rainbow for Girls

Young ladies from 11 to 20 are eligible. The organization prepares girls for responsible and purposeful adulthood through character and leadership development, encouraging unselfish service and higher ideals of life, and promoting teamwork and effective interpersonal communications.



Perpetual Membership

This is a program from the Grand Lodge to provide a mechanism to ensure that you are always a member of your Lodge. You can purchase this membership with a fee equivalent to 20 years plus one year current dues for your lodge (minimum \$1000). This fee feeds into an endowment fund from which your lodge receives a stipend forever. It's a lot of money, but you would never have to pay dues to your lodge again and you would be providing for your lodge long after you have passed on.