

THE GRAND LODGE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS



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COVID-19 – Frequently Asked Questions & Guidance – April 16, 2020

How long before we can meet in person? When can we have a regular communication?

We will follow the Governor's mandate, which now has a "stay at home" order, with no groups larger than 10 meeting through May 4. No face-to-face Lodge meetings may be held at least through May 4.

Do we need dispensations to cancel regular Stated Communications due to the virus?

Dispensations are not required. The Grand Master's EDICT, issued on March 16, 2020, allows the Worshipful Masters of Constituent Lodges of this Grand Jurisdiction to cancel Stated Communications as appropriate.

May we hold a Stated Communication online?

No. Holding online Stated Communications will not be allowed at this time.

Why can't we hold a Stated Communication online?

Our Opening and Closing Masonic Ritual are a vital part of a Stated Communication, not just for the officers, but for all the Brethren in attendance. The Opening Ritual sets the tone for the meeting, instructing and reminding each of us how to act during the meeting, while the Closing Ritual reminds us how to act in our daily lives. I will not allow Masonic Ritual to be performed 'virtually'. Therefore, the Opening and Closing Ritual of a Stated Communication, as well as Degree work, will not transpire online.

Despite not holding an online Stated Communication, I encourage you and your Brethren to continue to meet virtually and have Masonic discussions. I would also encourage you to include your EA's and FC's in those discussions. There are hundreds of topics on which further Masonic Light can be provided that do not divulge the secrets of Masonry or go beyond the teachings of the EA or FC Degree.

May we rehearse online?

I will not allow Masonic Ritual to be rehearsed or performed 'virtually'.

May we conduct business online?

Master, Wardens, Secretaries and Treasurers should consult regularly via phone, email or online in order to approve and pay regular bills. All transactions should be recorded and made available to the members at your next in-person communication. Any capital projects and or large expenditures should be on-hold at this time. No reading of applications, no candidate interviews, and no performance of candidate lessons is permitted at this time. A pre-application meeting between the Master, Wardens and Applicant may happen online. The candidate's name still must be read in open Lodge (when we are able to do so). The investigating committee must meet with the applicant in-person (after we are allowed to do so) and the vote must be taken when the Lodge meets again. All after due notice has been issued to members via standard Lodge procedures.

May we ballot on our candidates online?

No. Balloting needs to be done in a tiled Lodge.

May the building be used for blood drives by the Red Cross?

Yes, for "essential" services only. If the building is used, a program to disinfect it must be created and utilized to protect members and the public.

May we use our current dispensation for a Table Lodge (or other event) if we change the date due to the virus?

Yes, but please send a letter to the Grand Master and Grand Secretary indicating the change of date.

Can we change our Time of Darkness to April and May, allowing us to meet during times when we would normally would have been dark?

A Grand Master cannot grant a dispensation for this request. No such dispensation is specified in Article VI.1.2 of the Grand Lodge Constitution.

Please refer to Article XIII.1.2 of the Grand Constitution which allows the Worshipful Master of any Constituent Lodge within the Grand Jurisdiction of New Hampshire to call for a Special Communication of their Lodge. Article XIII.1.2.A. specifically states "A Lodge may act at a Special Communication ONLY upon the matter for which it has been specially called, due notice of both the Communication and special matter to be acted upon shall be given to every member of the Lodge." As such, a Worshipful Master may call a Special Communication of their Lodge for any matter necessary, including but not limited to, degree work and business of the Lodge, provided due notice is properly provided to the Lodge membership outlining the reason for which the Special Communication has been called. The EXCEPTION to this, which DOES require dispensation from the Grand Master, is calling a Special Communication for receiving or balloting on a petition for any type of membership (See Grand Lodge Constitution Article VI1.2 Item 3).

Assuming COVID-19 related restrictions on gathering are lifted, you can call Special Communications during those times when your Lodge is in darkness. So long as you clearly notify the Brethren when calling this Special Communication of the content and purpose of the meeting, then your goal of maintaining continuity of your Labor can be fulfilled.

May we do Memorial a.k.a. Masonic Funeral Services for a departed Brother?

It is important we do not ignore a request for a Masonic Funeral Service. Contact the family – express the Lodge’s condolences, as well as your own. Explain the restrictions we are bound by. Funeral homes may not allow us to attend and may only offer private services during this time. If we can participate, we obviously may only send a small group of Brethren to comply with the Governor’s request. In this situation, please explain to families many more Brethren wished to attend. Consider offering the family the opportunity to come to a future Lodge meeting to honor him when things improve. If they would prefer a personal ceremony instead, find a way to honor that request. We are called to care for each other in this time of need, now more than ever. Being there for the families of our departed Brethren is no exception.

Has a date been identified for our postponed May Annual Communication?

Plans are currently underway to hold the Annual Communication on the morning of Saturday, November 21, 2020. We will open the Annual Communication, perform the required work, and close the Annual Communication. We will then open the Semiannual Communication of Grand Lodge on that same day and conduct required business prior to closing the Semiannual Communication.

Our Lodge is in the middle of a merger. What do we do?

You will need to work behind the scenes, online or via email with all members. No vote to merge will be taken prior to a Stated Communication in person. If you have special circumstances, you should contact the Grand Master for guidance.

We have applications. What should we do?

For now, stay in constant contact with all candidates. Contact them on multiple occasions with motivational videos, information about the Craft as well as letting them know what’s happening and going to happen (future events) in New Hampshire Freemasonry. Demonstrating your care and concern for the candidate and his family before he has become a member in good standing is a real-life example of the Brotherly Love and Affection we proclaim. This simple gesture staying in contact and asking about their wellbeing could have a profound effect on their feeling for your Lodge and the Craft.

Helpful tips for interacting online.

May we gather informally online?

Yes, you are encouraged to do so. Here are some options for free online meetings:
<https://www.howtogeek.com/661906/the-6-best-free-video-conferencing-apps/>

See information here on how to protect your online meetings:
<https://uit.stanford.edu/service/zoom/meetingsecurityguide>

Should we make our Masonic networking meetings public?

Do NOT make any of your online meetings public. They should be by invitation-only. In other words, do not make your meeting link open to the public. There have been reports that unidentified individuals have accessed and disrupted meetings.

What steps should we take to mitigate teleconference hijacking threats?

- Do not make meetings public. In Zoom, there are two options to make a meeting private; require a meeting password or use the waiting room feature and control the admittance of guests.
- Do not share a link to a teleconference on an unrestricted publicly available social media post. Provide the link directly to specific people.
- Manage screensharing options. In Zoom, change screensharing to “Host Only.”
- Ensure users are using the updated version of remote access/meeting applications. In January 2020, Zoom updated their software. In their security update, the teleconference software provider added passwords by default for meetings and disabled the ability to randomly scan for meetings to join.

Do not interpret anything listed here to circumvent your Lodge Bylaws. Rather, this is a means and method to fulfill your obligations now and until we can meet and have regular Communications.

A formal notification with more details and instructions shall be issued when we are able to meet face-to-face. In the meantime, follow the guidance above. These guidelines are subject to revision at any time during the crisis.

Follow reason, use common sense, stay safe!

Fraternally,



Kenneth A, Clay, Jr., Grand Master

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Helpful Hints when Meeting Online – April 16, 2020

The following tips and hints have been pulled together to help everyone have the best possible experience when meeting online while also staying safe.

Zoom isn't the only platform

While it is certainly the most popular platform now, there are several solutions available to use with different capabilities and costs. It should be noted that it is the host's account that determines how many can attend and how long the meeting can last. In addition to Zoom, WebEx, and GotoMeeting, are also worth reviewing.

Get comfortable with the tool before the meetings

While many will tell you that these tools are simple and easy to use, as a host there are additional settings and options that a participant doesn't have access to. You should take the time to review those options before scheduling and hosting a meeting.

Security and privacy

First, review the last few questions in the Grand Master's COVID FAQ document. While the tips there focus on Zoom, they are applicable to all platforms. As security and privacy have become of greater concern, several of the items listed are now "on" by default.

In addition, remember, you're inviting everyone on the call "into your home," so take a few minutes to look at what's in the camera's view. Are there items in the background that you may not want everyone to see? Perhaps the family calendar, artwork, or the rest of the bedroom? A few moments reviewing what's there could save some embarrassment or share details about the other members of your family that you want to keep private.

If you're hosting the meeting and planning to share your screen, take a few minutes and review what's on your computer's desktop. Do you have applications open that have sensitive information viewable? Is your desktop wallpaper appropriate? Are you okay with everyone seeing what applications are running? Do you have what you want to share handy? If you're going to demonstrate something, run through it a few times so you're comfortable. Also, consider turning off desktop notification during the meeting to eliminate that distraction.

Recording your meeting

Among the tools a host has is the ability to record the meeting. It may be tempting to record every meeting where you're the host, however, take a moment to determine if the meeting should be recorded. If you decide it needs to be recorded, you **ARE REQUIRED** to inform those that are joining the call that it is being recorded. Include a notice in your invite (WebEx does this by default), announce it before you start recording, and periodically remind those in attendance that the meeting is being recording so that they may drop from the call if they so choose.

For those who would prefer a notification that's a bit more formal:

Brethren, pursuant to New Hampshire's 2 Party Consent Statute. 570-A:2, this is to advise you that this meeting will be recorded. Anyone who does not wish to participate in this recorded meeting should remove himself immediately. For those remaining, the disclosure of recording signifies your consent under the referenced Statute. You will take due notice thereof and govern yourself accordingly.

Online meetings aren't just video

While everyone is looking for face to face interaction, including on camera, it is important to understand that these platforms allow for individuals to join without a camera. Be sure ~~to make sure~~ when you send your invitation out that you make that information known, don't exclude someone just because they don't have a camera.

A few things to improve your meeting experience

Camera – Don't go out and buy a special web camera. In most cases the camera you have built into your computer, laptop, phone, will work just fine.

Microphone – There's no need to go out and buy a microphone, you likely already have what you need. The earbuds you use to make calls on your phone will work just fine, as will the microphone built into your web camera.

Lighting – When getting ready to join the meeting, check your room lighting. Brighter is better. Remember, while you might like lower light levels for working, your camera may have a difficult time with it.

Sound – When you are in a meeting, remember, your microphone hears everything and shares it with everyone. Consider muting your microphone when you aren't speaking. Expect that others are doing the same, and give them a moment or two to unmute before answering.

Be present – You'll be just a mouse click away from your email, your web browser, and social media – resist the urge! While video calls are a bit less formal than meeting face to face, the others attending still deserve your attention, so consider closing those other windows during the meeting.

Sound/Audio Addition – When you are using video and computer voice, it consumes a lot more bandwidth, and you may find that your voice seems garbled to others or that you cannot hear well. You may want to join the video with your computer but join the audio by phone - understand calling charges may apply regarding your own personal long-distance usage. However, most cell phones have unlimited calling and do not apply long distance charges anymore, so you can easily join the video by the computer and audio by your cell phone.

The use of online communication is growing by the day and yes there will be growing pains and a few laughs along the way (don't forget to unmute!). The items covered here are meant to help you get the most out of this opportunity. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out.

Follow reason, use common sense, stay safe!

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kenneth A. Clay, J." The signature is written in a cursive style and is contained within a light gray rectangular border.

Grand Lodge of NH, F&AM

Social Media and New Hampshire Freemasons

The Grand Lodge of New Hampshire recognizes that the use of social media is growing by leaps and bounds and its goal is to support the regular and extensive use of it. We understand that many Brethren are now connected by Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and others. We as Masons are to be mindful however that our individual postings not only reflect our own character but that of Freemasonry.

Social Media Policy

- A Mason should conduct himself as he would in front of the general public with courtesy for others.
- As a Mason, he must be aware that his postings are a permanent record; therefore, his conduct may influence the world with a positive or negative opinion about him personally and about the organizations to which he belongs.
- A Mason should never use disparaging comments, profanity, etc. while posting; including, but not limited to graphic video and audio recordings.
- A Mason should be mindful of “ritual” postings on the web.
- Masonic pages are to be supportive of the organization and its members, promote upcoming events, discussion of past events, video sharing, and discussion of times of fellowship and promotion of Masonic bodies.
- A Mason should not use Social media to obtain personal advantage in promoting political, religious or business activities by targeting other Masons.
- There should never be discussion in regards to an application, background, or investigation of an applicant.
- There should never be discussion in regards to the ballot of a candidate.
- There should never be discussion related to the Business of a Lodge and what is discussed behind Tyled doors.
- Information about Lodge or District social activities must comply with the regulations already in place for them (for example no reference to alcohol or games of chance).
- We should seek Brother to Brother intervention. As a Mason you should advise a brother if something he has posted is improper within the framework of our Grand Constitution, Rules and Regulations, etc.

Ultimately, your actions as a Mason on these Social media sites should promote the highest standards of morality and integrity. You should always be mindful of the penalties as described in the Grand Constitution relating to trial, suspension, and/or expulsion for any un-Masonic behavior. Posting a comment related to the Fraternity and then posting a disparaging comment about a social or political stance can easily be misconstrued by readers that your stance is representative of Masonry and all Masons. Be mindful that the public and members of the Masonic Fraternity are reading your posts on Social Media.