



THE GRAND LODGE
OF ANCIENT FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS OF NEW MEXICO

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April 25, 2020

To the Brethren of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of New Mexico:

We have all been tracking the spread of the novel Coronavirus through our country. In the last week, two other Grand Jurisdictions postponed their annual communications: Arizona, which had been scheduled for June 5th, and Washington State, which had been scheduled for June 12th. Our governor extended the stay-at-home order until at least May 15th, and introduced a phased reentry for businesses with "larger gatherings and events still restricted for the foreseeable future." It looks like we may be restricted in masonic gatherings for some time.

Despite these setbacks, many Masonic bodies are exploring innovative solutions to stay active. The Grand York Rite of Idaho held their Annual Session virtually via ZOOM. They conducted all of their planned business and employed anonymous online voting for election of officers. The Grand Lodge of New Mexico is exploring these and all other options to reduce disruption of business for our Blue Lodges. If you have ideas, please share with RW Jonathan Andrews or RW Steve Almager, and we will explore those as well. Along those lines, here is some updated guidance to help each lodge continue to operate in these trying times.

The Grand Master's Edict #1 is still in effect, which aligns with the state-issued emergency declarations prohibiting in-person meetings of more than 5 people. Many lodges are employing online meetings to socialize and some have been conducting untyled business. To provide some clarity:

There is a difference between **WORK** and **BUSINESS** of the lodge.

WORK includes:

1. Tyled openings and closings
2. Conferring of Degrees
3. **BALLOTING** (this is different from **VOTING**)
4. Masonic trials
5. Other acts that require Masonic secrecy and/or anonymity

BUSINESS includes (from the Official Monitor and Ceremonies):

1. Unfinished business
2. Reports on Standing Committees
3. Reports on Special Committees
4. Presentation of petitions for the Degrees and for Affiliations

5. Report on Committees on petitions (without **BALLOTING**)
6. Communications and Presentation of Bills
7. Motions and Resolutions in writing
8. Miscellaneous business

The **WORK** of a lodge is not allowed in an untyled setting, and no solution has been approved for remote, virtual, or online tyled lodge activities at this time. However, the **BUSINESS** of the lodge, including voting for **BUSINESS** items may proceed via phone or virtual sessions.

Here are some examples:

1. Petitions for degrees or for affiliation can be received and read. Investigation committees may be formed and an in-person investigation can be conducted (but they must not exceed 5 people including the candidate and their family. Investigation committees must practice proper social distancing, and should wear personal protective equipment per local guidance).
2. **BALLOTING** on petitions or for affiliation, or for the election of officers, is not allowed.
3. Degrees **SHALL NOT** be conferred
4. Proficiencies may still be heard by a committee (again, in groups less than 5 with social distancing and protective equipment). That committee may be held over the phone, or online. The candidate and coach must ensure that they are in a private setting for phone/online proficiencies, and the committee must maintain privacy while hearing the proficiency (for example, use headphones or the handset, not a speaker phone).
5. The voice **VOTE** if using the phone or **VOTING** with the usual sign of a Master Mason may be done remotely after the committee reports on the proficiency.
6. Payment of bills, distribution of funds, etc. already included in a lodge's approved budget may, as always, continue without vote. If unforeseen and/or unapproved expenses arise, the Master may pay them out with the consent of the lodge. This consent is a **VOTE** and may be conducted via phone or virtual meeting. The call for a meeting **MUST** be made to give every Mason the opportunity to participate and be heard. The lodge may discuss, approve or disapprove via their **VOTE**.
7. Any other **BUSINESS** requiring a **VOTE** may be conducted over the phone or via videoconferencing. **WORK** and any **BALLOTING** shall not be conducted at this time.

There is clearly a lot of **BUSINESS** that can be conducted during the stay-at-home times. The **WORK** that is currently not allowed, as it requires a tyled meeting is being investigated by the Grand Lodge Officers, the Committee on Jurisprudence, and conversations with Past Grand Masters to determine a suitable solution. We are watching other Grand Jurisdictions explore the same problem set and are eager to learn from their experiences. As we and other Grand Jurisdictions explore these solutions, there may be opportunities for the Grand Master to authorize dispensation for limited **WORK**, though no such dispensation is available yet. The

Grand Lodge of New Mexico is committed to reducing strain on Blue Lodges and will keep the brethren apprised of any changes as research progresses.

Sincerely and Fraternally

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph A. Easley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "R".

Ralph A. Easley
Grand Master