

Examining A Visitor To Your Lodge

by
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This program has been developed in support of the Statewide Masonic Education Plan developed by the Grand Provost of the Grand Lodge of Virginia and the Committee on Masonic Education. The first quarter 1994 plan recommended a program be presented to the Brethren on Regularity, Recognition and Fraternal Relations. This program is directed toward courteous and respectful Fraternal Relations that should be accorded to all Master Masons.

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Narrator:

The purpose of this program is to educate the brethren on the procedures for examining a visitor to your lodge. This program will encompass two aspects of Lodge visitation:

1. Lodge procedures for examining and admitting a visitor
2. The visitor's responsibility and questions he should ask

Research for this program involved extensive use of the electronic bulletin boards available to Masons. In addition, several discussions were held with several Past Grand Masters and Brethren from across the Nation. Most of the responses indicated that there was no real procedure available on the proper procedures for examining a visitor. As a matter of fact, several of the brethren indicated that some visitors to a lodge have actually walked out in disgust because of an intense examination. Most of the brethren agreed that a standard procedure for examining a fellow Brother Master Mason would be a very useful tool. Hence, the following program has been developed to demonstrate a procedure for examining a visitor, formalize the examination process to ensure a visitor to your Lodge is sufficiently examined to the satisfaction of the Lodge and lastly, to ensure a visitor to your Lodge is given the common courtesy afforded a Master Mason that will keep him coming back.

The Ornaments Of A Lodge Are The Brethren That Frequent It

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

- 1 Narrator
- Select 4 brethren to help (1 to play the visitor and three to act as examiners)
- Ensure the Worshipful Master is fully briefed and try to encourage him to play the part of Worshipful Master during the program.
- Brief the Tiler and Senior Deacon (this is explained the program)
- Select a Lodge Member to yell in disgust from the sidelines (explained later in the program)
- Ensure the Tiler's oath, a small Bible and List of Lodges, Masonic (published by Pentagraph Publishing Company, Bloomington, Illinois) are available for the examining committee.

Brethren, this Program will take place in the Lodge room however; in actuality, this situation would take place prior to the Lodge opening. A visitor showing up after Lodge has started will be explained later.

A visiting Brother Master Mason enters your Lodge social hall and informs a member that he has never visited the Lodge and he does not know anyone. This is important because if the Brother does know someone and has sat in Lodge with that person, then the Lodge Brother can vouch for the visitor. This program assumes the visitor is completely unknown.

Not All Good Men Are Masons, But All Masons Are Good Men

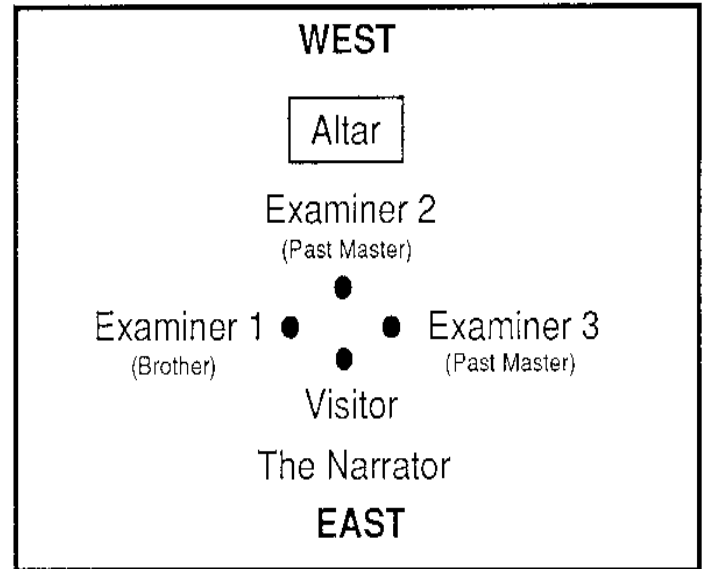
The first thing we need to establish is who may be permitted to visit a Lodge?

Masonic Law states any Master Mason who is a member in good standing of a Virginia Lodge or of a Lodge holden under a Grand Lodge recognized by the Grand Lodge of Virginia may be permitted to visit any just and legally constituted Lodge open in any of the three symbolic degrees. This may sound straight forward but it is important as will be demonstrated later during the program.

An Entered Apprentice or Fellowcraft who is eligible for Masonic instruction may be permitted to visit a lodge working in any degree which he has received. This is also Masonic Law in accordance with the Methodical Digest Section 2.133. One important note: He must be accompanied by a Master Mason who has sat in Lodge with him. Examining a visitor is only for the purpose of examining a Master Mason, therefore, if both the visiting Entered Apprentice or Fellowcraft accompanied by a fellow Master Mason are unknown, then the visiting Master Mason can be examined and he can then vouch for the Entered Apprentice or Fellowcraft.

As we all know, the Worshipful Master of a Lodge rules and governs that lodge so one important note that is sometimes overlooked is that everyone admitted into a Lodge, whether a member or not, must have the permission of the Worshipful Master. In addition, according to Masonic Law, a visitor, other than a Grand Lodge Officer or a District Deputy Grand Master cannot enter, or remain in Lodge if any member objects (Methodical Digest 2.135). Masonic visitation is one of the most widely used and enjoyed rights as practiced in Virginia.

There are two ways in which a Mason may gain admittance to a Lodge, namely, by "due trial or strict examination" or by being vouched for by a Lodge Brother present in the Lodge. Now to



begin the program I would like everyone to assume the Lodge for the time being is the social hall and a visitor has just entered.

(After the Narrator calls the examination committee together, they should meet at the Alter as shown above.)

Visitor:

(Gets up from the sidelines and walks to the center of the Lodge)
Hello, my name is Brother Visitor and I am a member of Northern Exposure Lodge Number 264, Fairbanks, Alaska. I request a committee to examine and vouch for me.

Narrator:

Before the visitor can be examined he must state the name and location of the Lodge of which he holds membership, or was lately a member, or in which he received the Masonic Degrees which shall be reported to the Master, or the Lodge, before a committee of examination can be appointed. The visitor needs to have his dues card ready to present to a Lodge Brother normally the Tiler. The dues card can be up to two years old!

Examiner #1:

(Gets up and moves to the Alter to greet the visitor)

Welcome Brother, my name is Brother _____, the Lodge Tiler, and I will check your legal Masonic information. Afterwards, I will select a committee to examine you.

Narrator:

This is wrong! The Tiler or a Brother can check the dues card and List of Lodges Masonic but only the Worshipful Master can appoint the examination committee. The committee can be comprised of as many brethren as the Master desires preferably skilled in the art of examining a visitor. The committee on work recommends a minimum of two Brothers.

Examiner #2:

(Gets up from the sidelines and moves to the Alter)

Worshipful Master, I talked with the visitor before Lodge last week at work and even though I have never sat in Lodge with him, I did satisfy myself that he is a Mason.

Narrator:

Although this may be very interesting, it is **not** acceptable information for a visitor to be admitted into a Lodge. If you have not sat in a Lodge with the visitor and have no legal Masonic information that he is a Mason, such as a letter from our Grand Secretary, you cannot vouch for him. Our ritual states that till by strict trial, due examination or legal Masonic information....

Now, the visitor does not have to be examined if a Brother has sat in Lodge with another Mason or if he knows from legal Masonic examination or other legal information that a third person, in this case our visitor is a Mason, he may avouch for him. It is however still the Worshipful Master's unquestioned prerogative to require an examination of any visitor seeking admission to his Lodge.

Examiner #1:

(Ask visitor for his dues card and check the book of Lodges)

Worshipful Master, I have checked his dues card and the List of Lodges Masonic and found the visitor's Lodge listed in his home State. His legal Masonic information checks out.

Narrator:

This is not the whole story! The Tiler must also check at the bottom of the Lodges listed under Virginia to see if his State is recognized by the Grand Lodge of Virginia. Recently, when some States recognized Prince Hall Masonry, or for some other petty or "political" reasons where feelings were hurt, real or imagined, withdrew recognition of those States.

Once the Lodge is satisfied that the visitor's Lodge is regular, **the Worshipful Master** appoints the committee to examine the visitor. Will Brothers _____, _____, _____, serve as an examination committee to examine our visitor. The visitor and committee would then leave the room to examine the visitor.

The following discussions take place in the examination room: Remember that the committee is in an official relationship with the visitor and therefore their manners are formal. Their only purpose is to satisfy themselves that the visitor is, or is not, a Regular Master Mason in good standing.

Examiner #3:

May I see your dues card?

Visitor:

Yes, and may I see yours? In addition, may I see the Lodge Charter?

Narrator:

Yes, the visitor has the right, and he should, to satisfy himself that the Lodge he is visiting is regular. Normally, if the visitor is going to ask

for the Lodge Charter, he should do it before the examination. In addition, the visitor should call the Lodge in advance of his visit to inquire about the dress code. Some Lodges prefer everyone to be in a business suit but in some Lodges throughout the State this would be inappropriate. The visitor would feel more at home and possibly prevent a little discomfort if he just calls in advance. When in Rome, dress like the Romans.

The first thing that should be done is to have all four Brothers in the examining room hold the Bible with their right hands. The Bible should be opened to any page. The Tiler's oath should lay on top so that everyone can read it. All four Brothers should read the Tiler's oath together. Following the oath, all four Brothers kiss the Bible.

The committee and visitor repeat the oath:

TILER'S OATH

I _____ Hereon solemnly swear that I have been Regularly Initiated, Passed and Raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason in a Just and Legally Constituted Master Mason's Lodge, that I am not now suspended or expelled and know of no reason why I should be.

Narrator:

Note: Some Lodges say the Tiler's oath after the examination. Justification can be rationalized to do it either way. Either case is not Masonic Law but it is recommended by the Committee on Work to say the Tiler's Oath first. As in a court of law, the witnesses and jury take the oath right up front.

Examiner #3:

Let me ask the first question. What does a HECATOMB refer to?

Narrator:

Brethren, the only thing missing from this first question is the sound of Jeopardy music playing in the background. We **do not** want to find out how much the Master Mason knows about Masonry. The purpose of the examining committee is to determine if the visitor is a Mason!

The Committee on Work recommends that the first question is to ask the visitor if he knows the SECRET word of a Master Mason. If he tells you the condition for giving it, then gives it correctly, the Committee on Work has indicated that the examining committee should be satisfied that the visitor is a Master Mason.

However, in some cases, the visitor may not remember the SECRET word due to the fact that he has not been in Lodge for many years; then additional questions should be asked. Such questions may be the due guard, sign and word of other degrees. These may be convincing to the examiners if properly given. In addition, the signs are given at the opening and closing so the visitor will need to show them.

Brethren remember, we are only trying to satisfy ourselves that the visitor is a Mason. We certainly do not want to embarrass him or make him feel uncomfortable. As soon as we are satisfied that the visitor is a Mason, we should start giving information about our Lodge or the meeting that will make him feel more "at home", and will keep him from being embarrassed. Then hopefully, he will either be a regular visitor to your Lodge or he will at least go back to his home Lodge with a warm and fraternal report on his visit.

By now, we may be thinking that our work is done. The committee is satisfied that the visitor is a Mason and Lodge is about to start. This is not the case. The committee along with the visitor should assemble in the ante-room with the Tiler. An alarm is heard and investigated at the door, and the Tiler announces the

examination committee is ready and a Brother avouched for. The committee then enters the room, gives the Due guard and announces the Brother. (The committee and visitor at this point move to the West side of the Alter, perform the due guard and announce the visitor.)

Examiner #1:

Worshipful Master, we are pleased to present Brother (visitor), Past Master of Northern Exposure Lodge #264 Fairbanks Alaska.

Lodge Member:

Worshipful Master, I want this visitor removed! I **will not** sit in Lodge with him!

Narrator:

Yes! This can legally happen. Any Lodge Member can refuse to sit in Lodge with a visiting Master Mason. Note that one visiting Mason cannot refuse to sit in Lodge with another visiting member.

The examining committee should enter the Lodge without the visitor. The committee should report to the Worshipful Master that they are satisfied that the visitor is a Mason. The Worshipful Master may then order the Junior Deacon to admit the visitor if there are no objections by the members. This procedure could prevent an ugly situation in Lodge and prevent a visitor from being embarrassed in front of his fellow Masons.

As I thought about this for a few moments I was concerned why any Master Mason would refuse to sit in Lodge with a visiting Brother. Let's pull this thread a little. Are there situations in which a Brother or the Worshipful Master would refuse admittance to his Lodge by a visitor? For example, a discussion of a very delicate matter concerning that Lodge only, discussions concerning a Lodge Brother or funding issues. Visiting a Lodge is a privilege, not a right (to seek to visit a Lodge is, however, every Mason's right). If the Worshipful Master does refuse

admittance to any visitor etiquette requires that he call the Senior Deacon to his side and privately instruct him to go to the Ante-room to instruct the Tiler not to admit the visitor. A visitor may be refused admittance for reasons that do not reflect upon him personally.

According to strict Masonic principles, no visitor should ever come to the door of a Lodge except solely as a visitor — a Mason desiring to sit in a Lodge and to enjoy its fellowship.

If he acts in the capacity of an emissary or as an agent, rather than in his own capacity, he should not come as a visitor except on the Master's invitation and according to arrangements previously made — otherwise he should be denied the privilege of visiting, if this is known beforehand.

Another example of a justifiable exclusion for non-personal reasons, imagine the following situation: some association or society in the community has under way an enterprise that is foreign or even alien to Masonry, but needs funds and decides to solicit the Lodge. For this purpose, it selects as a solicitor one of its own members who happens to be a Mason. If the Master refuses to give a hearing to their case, he ought to refuse admittance to their agent.

Just as, and in the same spirit as, he might refuse to have a matter brought before the Lodge by letter or by a motion.

This concludes the program and I would just like to summarize a few key points that I believe are important. A Worshipful Master should consider assembling an examination committee even if a Brother is avouched for if the Master thinks the visitor may be embarrassed. Specifically, the examining committee should be used to brief the visitor on Lodge procedures prior to the start of Lodge. In addition, the Master could use this as an opportunity to select some young Masons to train them on the proper procedures for examining a visitor.

Secondly, I believe it is very important that we examine the visitor only to determine if he is a Master and not to grill him on his knowledge of the craft. These kinds of things can be discussed after Lodge in the fellowship hall.

And lastly Brethren, we cannot have dedication without education!

I would like to introduce and thank the cast.

**Masonic labor is purely a labor of
love**

**he who seeks to draw Masonic
wages**

**in gold or silver will be
disappointed.**

**The wages of a Mason are earned
and paid**

**in their dealings with one another,
sympathy begets sympathy,**

**kindness begets kindness,
helpfulness begets helpfulness,**

**and these are the wages of a
Mason.**

Benjamin Franklin

Can't Be Dedication Without Education

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Thanks also to those many Brethren who offered their inputs, review, and directly applicable stories concerning Lodge visitation.