

# SECTION 7

## DISTRICT LODGE OF INSTRUCTION



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## **SECTION 7 – DISTRICT LODGE OF INSTRUCTION**

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

Lodges of Instruction are designed to instil discipline in the conferring of degrees, in the conduct of our social affairs and in the other rituals we engage in such as the Memorial Service. Masons should not question the value of doing things correctly since the self discipline fostered in this manner inspires the practice of moral discipline in the observance of the lessons contained in the Book of the Work. How we convey the moral lessons is often as important as the lessons themselves because excellence in their portrayal enhances the importance our system of morality represents to all who receive and witness them. It conveys the message that what we have to offer the candidate is so significant that the degrees must be conferred with accuracy, precision and reverence. Propriety in the manner in which we relate to one another conveys a message that we value our fellow brethren so much that correct and courteous demeanour in our relationships is fundamental to our brotherhood.

As Masons we are called on to make a daily advancement in Masonic knowledge. We are informed that as we increase in knowledge so we will consequently improve in social intercourse. There exists a tangible comfort level to be enjoyed by those who know well what they are doing and why they are doing it in a particular manner. It transcends the mundane and gives meaning to how we live our lives as men and as Masons.

Grand Lodge Lodges of Instruction can only do so much in educating and fostering improvement in the conferral of degrees and in the conduct of our other activities. Each typically combines the brethren of three Masonic Districts who can attend an evening of instruction and entertainment. Distance and the pressure of other commitments can restrict the numbers able to attend. This reality underscores the importance of those who attend. They can perform an invaluable service in communicating to the other brethren of their Districts the instruction received on a wide variety of topics.

Each Masonic District has a District Deputy Grand Master responsible for granting dispensation to hold a Lodge of Instruction (section 102 of the Book of Constitution, 2002).

He may also appoint a competent brother to instruct any lodge in his District which may desire instruction (section 103 of the Book of Constitution, 2002).

An organized District Lodge of Instruction under the direction of competent brethren is an excellent means of educating the brethren in the latest information provided each year by the Lodges of Instruction conducted by Grand Lodge. It is a useful vehicle for conveying instruction on a wider variety of topics than can be accomplished in that forum. Depending on his availability these District Lodges of Instruction can benefit from the presence of the Custodian of the Work who has a duty to conduct Lodges of Instruction pursuant to section 93(c) of the Book of Constitution. However, District

Lodges of Instruction should take advantage of the skilled and accomplished Masons within the District as much as possible. The very act of teaching is a learning experience and a regular local initiative bringing the District lodges together provides a common experience for the conduct of our Masonic activity. It allows the bar by which our Work is done to be raised for each Mason and each lodge.

## 7.2 ORGANIZATION

Organizing a District Lodge of Instruction should commence with the District Deputy Grand Master as his dispensation will be required to conduct it. However, a mechanism for identifying topics of interest and the needs of the brethren should be established. A body of learned Masons with this responsibility can provide continuity over time in building a more knowledgeable membership in a systematic manner. This body can take the form of a District committee established by the District Deputy Grand Master or be one with assigned representatives from each of the District lodges.

Whatever its form and composition, it is important that the group be restricted to Masons who have demonstrated a superior knowledge of things Masonic, the ability to learn and the ability to convey their knowledge to others in a manner that will be enjoyed by all. Respected and knowledgeable Masons exist in every District. The resources are abundant. We need to utilize them. Participation in a District Lodge of Instruction in any capacity may well assist in stemming the Masonic "brain drain" of experienced Masons from the lodge room to the T.V. room.

### 7.3 TOPIC SELECTION

There are different approaches to the task of selecting topics to be covered in a Lodge of Instruction depending on a needs assessment conducted by the Instruction committee. If there are clear and pressing problems that exist a triage approach may be needed to address these issues. As the emergency physician will assess the severity of medical problems in patients arriving at the emergency department, the committee may need to rank the issues on a priority basis and deal with those considered most pressing first.

As the conduct of Lodges of Instruction proceeds the need for a systematic approach to topic selection will become apparent. At some point we should be able to move to a

situation where the Lodges of Instruction become a maintenance program of regular exposure to instruction on central topics as a means of continually renewing a commitment to quality standards as the faces in the officer chairs in the lodges change. This program, like most of those we encounter at the Grand Lodge or District level, will benefit from long range planning. This planning can relate not just to the selection of topics to be presented over time. It can also relate to the need to change the composition of the Instruction committee to utilize Masons who can contribute to its work.

Long range planning can also prepare Masons in a District for special events and activities that occur as milestones in our life as Masons. For instance, anniversaries and receptions are examples of special events that entail demands on Masons that are equally "special". Too often the preparation for and conduct of these evenings is left in the hands of the very few brethren with some prior experience. Often the correct way of handling these events was learned through bitter experience. Identifying those projects that require instruction that is out of the ordinary well in advance provides an opportunity to educate a wider group of Masons who can assist in their successful completion. It will also provide a larger talent pool for the handling of such projects in the future.

The Grand Lodge of Instruction Team uses a wide variety of publications as resources for the topics it covers. A good starting point for any resource library for individual Masons and those that would lead them in District Lodges of Instruction is the Book of Constitution, The Book of the Work, Guidelines for Lodge Officers, Meeting the Challenge and the Masonic Manual. The content of these publications provides a comprehensive knowledge base for our regular activities in the conferral of degrees, the administration of the Craft and the lodges and for our duties as officers and Masons. The topics that can be adapted to a Lodge of Instruction are numerous and varied.

We need to know more than this. We need to know our history and the various interpretations of it. We need to know why what we do is relevant today by examining the circumstances that shaped our present situation. It has been said that those who

forget history are doomed to repeat it. It has also been said that those who know nothing of their history are doomed to a state of perpetual childhood. As Masons we need to participate in evenings of not only instruction but of debate. Expanding our researches into other publications of Masonic history and contemporary books touching on areas of Masonic interest provides fertile ground for topics that can entertain and instruct.

If pride in the significance of our Craft over time and a more comprehensive knowledge of its values are by-products we will be in a much better position to relate the importance of Freemasonry to others who express an interest in it.

## 7.4 THE MEETING

The recommendations for the conduct of lodge meetings are equally applicable to Lodges of Instruction. Start on time, deliver the product in an entertaining and educational fashion and end on time. The length of the overall program and the timing of breaks should reflect the fact that the average attention span is about forty minutes. Do not be too ambitious about the number of items included on the agenda. A few things learned well are more likely to be retained than several topics rushed to fit a limited time frame.

The delivery of material as well as those who deliver it should be varied to maintain interest. There should be an opportunity for interaction with the brethren and a time for questions should be built into the program. Visual aids are an effective method of fostering retention and should be considered when possible.

Comfort and availability of the brethren should be considered. Minds will not be attentive to the message if they are distracted by excessive heat or cold. June is not a good month to conduct a meeting in an upstairs lodge room that is not air conditioned. Many Masons are not available in the depths of winter either because of weather or the fact that they have left the weather behind and gone south.

## **7.5 FEEDBACK**

Feedback is critical to the long term success of most initiatives and District Lodges of Instruction are no exception. If they are to continue to educate and enhance our Masonic experience and improve the quality of our activities they must be interesting and responsive to the needs of the brethren. Therefore, the Instruction committee should invite suggestions for topics to be covered as well as feedback on the presentations. Written surveys for both purposes are useful in eliciting information that can be retained for reference by the committee. This can provide a basis for planning presentations. Records kept of previous presentations provide a means of keeping the committee aware of topics covered as its membership changes. The committee should be prepared to meet for the purpose of analyzing the presentation to identify what worked well and what did not. Similarly, minutes of these meetings will inform their successors of their experience and avoid a process where errors get repeated and the program falls into disrepute among the brethren.



## **7.6 THE FORMAT IS FUN**

If an activity is neither enjoyable nor rewarding it will not attract participants. It is important for the committee to place a premium on enjoying its work and on fashioning a program that ensures the brethren will enjoy its presentation. There is too much competition for a Mason's leisure time to do otherwise.