

# A Guide to the

## TEMPORARY EMERGENCY MEASURES FOR COVID-19 (the “Measures”)

### *Introduction*

1. The Measures have been introduced by direction of the MW The Grand Master to assist Lodges in these difficult and unprecedented times for Freemasonry. They are made under an implied power of the Grand Master – used very sparingly indeed – to act, as a matter of urgency where the welfare of the Craft is under threat, by giving a binding Direction. **The Measures have all the force of Rules in the Book of Constitutions.**
2. They are essentially simple and straightforward, though in order to avoid ambiguity the language in which they are expressed may appear somewhat daunting. This guide is intended to explain their meaning and the reasoning behind them. It also includes a number of Questions and Answers.
3. There are two basic principles which the Grand Master’s advisers and the Board of General Purposes have followed in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic: first that Freemasons must obey the law – in spirit as well as in letter; secondly that no unnecessary obstacle should be placed in the way of Lodges which wish to meet. The introduction of the “Rule of Six” has introduced fresh challenges, which the Measures aim to address.
4. Those Brethren who belong to other Orders will be aware that those Orders have produced their own responses to the challenges, just as each of those Orders has its own equivalent of the Book of Constitutions. **What applies in other Orders must not be assumed to apply also to the Craft, because in the Craft only the Book of Constitutions, the Edicts of Grand Lodge** (see *Information for the Guidance of Members of the Craft*) **and these Measures are relevant.**

### *Existing flexibility*

5. Even without the Measures there is a lot that a Lodge can do to make things more convenient for all concerned:
  - (a) a Metropolitan or Provincial Grand Master has power to grant a dispensation for a Lodge to meet at a different location (Rule 142), which does not have to be a Masonic Hall. Provided that he is satisfied that the premises can be adequately tyled, he can permit a meeting to be held in almost any location, including an office (or even a private house), **provided that the Rule of Six is complied with;**
  - (b) a Metropolitan or Provincial Grand Master has power to grant a dispensation for a Lodge to move the date of a meeting by up to 28 days **before or after** the date specified in its by-laws; and
  - (c) hardly any Lodge has a by-law which requires meetings to be held at a particular hour, so the time of a meeting can easily be changed to suit the temporary convenience of those attending.

## *New Provisions*

### *Voluntarily suspension of Meetings*

6. It is clear that many Brethren feel that it is pointless for the Secretary of a Lodge to have to issue a summons for a meeting in the knowledge that it will not be possible to hold that meeting on the day. Rule 137, however, states that there is no power to cancel a regular meeting of a Lodge. Paragraphs 1 to 4 of the Measures address this point by making it possible for a Lodge to suspend its meetings for a period of up to three months at a time, with no limit on the number of times it may do so. The following procedure must be observed:

(a) The Master must give written notice to the Metropolitan or Provincial Grand Master (or, in the case of a very small number of Lodges in London, to the Grand Secretary) that a majority of the members of the Lodge wish the Lodge to suspend its meetings for a specified period (not more than three months).

(b) The Metropolitan or Provincial Grand Master (or Grand Secretary) will acknowledge receipt of the notice to the Master, and on the receipt of the acknowledgement the suspension will come into effect.

(c) The Master may, with the same level of backing, seek permission to resume meetings before the suspension has run its course.

#### *Notes:*

- (i) *The notice to the Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Master must be given either in a letter (sent by post or delivered by hand) which is dated and signed by the Master, or in an e-mail.*
- (ii) *The notice must contain the statement that it is given “with the written agreement of not less than two-thirds of the subscribing members of ..... Lodge, No. ....”. The following form of words is suggested: “With the written agreement of not less than two-thirds of the subscribing members of ..... Lodge, No. .... I as Master of that Lodge hereby inform you that the majority of the subscribing members wish the Lodge to suspend its meetings for a period of [three] months from the date of this notice. [Signed] ..... [Dated].....”*
- (iii) *Before the notice can be sent, the Master must obtain the written agreement of two-thirds of **all** the subscribing members; any member who does not respond signifying his agreement has therefore cast a vote against voluntary suspension.*
- (iv) *The proportion of two-thirds of all subscribing members has been arrived at to make sure that it is neither “too easy” nor impossible for a Lodge to suspend itself.*
- (v) *The decision to suspend meetings is emphatically not that of the Master; he can neither force through nor block a suspension against the wishes of the subscribing members. For this reason, if the Master chooses not to seek the views of the members of the Lodge, any five subscribing members can insist that he writes to find out those views.*
- (vi) ***This is the only situation in which a postal or e-mail vote is permissible in the Craft.***
- (vii) *The same will apply to a decision to seek permission to end the voluntary suspension before it has come to an end.*
- (viii) *The Metropolitan or Provincial Grand Master (or the Grand Secretary) has no discretion to refuse to allow the Lodge to suspend itself, but he does have discretion to refuse to allow the early resumption of meetings.*

- (ix) *If the Master has died or is unable to act in the circumstances set out in Rule 119(a) that Rule will determine who is able to exercise the powers referred to above.*

### *Conduct of administrative business by video-conferencing facilities*

7. For any decision by a Craft Lodge to be valid, it must be taken by a vote in open Lodge. Although many other Orders are permitting Lodges to conduct “virtual business meetings”, the Pro Grand Master has recently made it clear that in the Craft there will not be any question of Lodges holding virtual untyled meetings. However, if Lodges continue to meet with attendance limited to a maximum of six Brethren, it is clear that most members of a Lodge would be unable to exercise their democratic right to participate in decisions affecting the Lodge, and would have to rely on the judgement of the small number present at a meeting.

8. A mechanism has therefore been devised **to enable any Brother who wishes to** participate in the transaction of Lodge business by means of an audio/video conferencing facility such as Zoom. The procedure set out in the Measures may appear unduly complex, but should in practice turn out to be easier to comply with than at first sight:

(a) If the agenda on a Lodge summons contains any administrative business (as opposed to the carrying out of a ceremony), whether financial or otherwise, **any** member may, not later than 72 hours before the time that the meeting is scheduled to begin, demand that a password-protected audio/video conference (an “A/VC”) is held, in which any member may participate either over the internet or by telephone.

(b) In such a case the Lodge will be opened in the normal way, and any necessary dispensation read and minutes voted on; it will then be Called-Off for the A/VC. The administrative business will then be transacted (including, if it is a regular meeting, the business that would normally be dealt with on the Risings), and all the decisions taken in the A/VC will then be adopted, on the declaration of the Master, by those present in person when the Lodge is Called-On again and recorded in the Minutes.

(c) Any business that does not require a ballot may be transacted in the A/VC (provided that any necessary notice has been given on the summons).

(d) Apart from confirming such decisions, no administrative business is to be taken after the Lodge is Called-On and no ceremonial business may be taken during the A/VC.

(e) If no one calls for an A/VC, the small group present in person may transact any business that a fuller meeting could transact in normal times, provided that (a) any necessary notice has been given on the summons and (b) the summons (and any supplement to it) has been sent to all the members so as to reach those resident in England and Wales, the Channel Isles and/or the Isle of Man at least 5 clear days before the meeting.

#### *Notes:*

(i) *A Lodge is not obliged to hold an A/VC unless one is demanded, but any subscribing member has an absolute right to demand such a conference and no coercion should be applied to a member to withdraw his demand once made.*

(ii) *Password protection for the A/VC is essential, and although it is not a tyled meeting, every reasonable*

*effort must be made to ensure that it is kept private for the whole of its duration.*

- (iii) *For the purpose of the application of paragraph 5 of the Measures, **and on no other occasion whatsoever**, the formula "By virtue of the power in me vested, I Call on/Call off the Lodge" may be used instead of the fuller form prescribed by the Lodge's normal ritual.*
- (iv) *The requirement for five clear days' notice is included to ensure that a member has a reasonable time in which to decide whether to demand an A/VC. It does **not** override a requirement in any Rule in the Book of Constitutions (or a Lodge's by-laws) for a longer period of notice in respect of a matter.*
- (v) *Subject to the five days' notice, or to any longer period required by a Rule in the Book of Constitutions, a ballot may be conducted at a meeting when no A/VC has been demanded.*

### *The Royal Arch*

9. **By direction of the ME The Grand Principals the Measures have (with any necessary changes) been applied also to the Royal Arch.**

## Questions and Answers

Q1. Can an A/VC be held to transact business separately from a physical meeting of a Lodge or Chapter?

A1. No. Other Orders may permit such meetings, but in the Craft and the Royal Arch a decision can only be taken in a physical meeting of a Lodge or Chapter.

Q2. Why is a ballot not permitted in an A/VC?

A2. The whole purpose of a ballot is to preserve secrecy, so that a member may vote according to his conscience without fear of recrimination. This is a principle on which no compromise is permissible. It must be accepted that secrecy cannot be guaranteed in an A/VC.

Q3. If a ballot cannot be held in an A/VC, how can a Lodge or Chapter elect new members.

A3. If no A/VC is demanded, and the requirements as to notice on the summons have been met, members can be balloted for in a meeting of five or six.

Q4. If my Lodge or Chapter voluntarily suspends its meetings will this affect its entitlement to a Centenary in due course?

A4. A Lodge is only liable to lose its entitlement to a Centenary Warrant if it fails to meet for a whole year (and therefore becomes liable to be erased under Rule 189). Provided that the Lodge has made all reasonable efforts to hold meetings, a longer period than a year may be disregarded by the Grand Master or by Supreme Grand Chapter.

Q5. Does a Lodge or Chapter need to record the voluntary suspension in its Minutes.

A.5 Yes. It is suggested that the following statement be used: “In accordance with the Temporary Emergency Measures directed by the MW The Grand Master/the ME The Grand Principals the Lodge/Chapter placed itself under voluntary suspension from ..... 20.. until ..... 20..”

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