

## Official Opinion of the Grand Master of Masons of North Carolina

October 9, 2020

On March 16, 2020, I issued an order calling for the cessation of all Masonic meetings to go into effect on March 18, 2020, at high noon. This order was a result of the serious health risks posed by the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. At the time, I believed the lodges would only be closed for a few weeks or perhaps a couple of months. However, it is now six months later and the Governor of the State of North Carolina has only recently issued an Executive Order permitting the lesser of 100 people or Thirty percent (30%) of stated fire capacity in a “meeting hall.” As a result, I issued an Order permitting lodges to reopen with certain restrictions on how many members could be physically present beginning on September 7, 2020.

I understand some lodges are choosing not to meet, some lodges’ schedules are still erratic, and some lodges cannot seat the entirety of their participating members due to restrictions on indoor meetings. As a result, many lodges have expressed a desire for their current officers, who have not truly served an entire year, to remain at their stations so they may have the opportunity to learn the lessons, ritual, and experience of their particular chair.

Given that it is likely that lodge meetings will continue to operate under certain restrictions for several more months, and there exists a greater possibility of lodge meetings being disrupted in the future, I have received a number of inquiries as to how subordinate lodges should handle the Annual Stated Communication and Election of Officers as specified in Regulation 54-1 of the CODE.

Upon review of the CODE, it is clear that no regulations contemplate the circumstances we are currently faced with. Accordingly, pursuant to Sections 8-2 and 8-6.3 of the Constitution of the Grand Lodge and Regulation 13-2.2 and 13-2.15 of the CODE, I am issuing an Official Opinion on this matter.

With regards to how a subordinate lodge should handle the Annual Stated Communication while they are under restrictions on who and/or how many members can be physically present, it is my Official Opinion that there are three options available to the lodge:

1. The Master of the lodge may transact the regular business of the Annual Stated Communication, including election of officers, on the date specified in Article 8, Section 4 of the lodge’s by-laws, if:
  - a. The number of members who wish to attend the meeting is less than or equal to the number permitted due to the imposed restrictions, and
  - b. The lodge meets the requirements for a quorum to open lodge, as defined by Regulation 45-8 of the CODE.
2. The Master may request a dispensation from the Grand Master to hold a virtual meeting for the purpose of conducting the regular business of the Annual Stated Communication,

including election of officers. The virtual meeting must be held in compliance with the requirements specified in my Official Opinion No. 1 on virtual lodges issued on April 29, 2020, and may be held in one of two ways:

- a. A completely virtual setting whereby all members in attendance are connected via the virtual platform or
  - b. A hybrid virtual setting, whereby a number of members, which is less than or equal to the number permitted due to the imposed restrictions, are physically present in the lodge and the remainder are connected via virtual platform. If this option is utilized, it is recommended that the officers who are physically present in the lodge building open the lodge on the Master Mason's degree prior to admitting the brethren who are connecting virtually.
3. Inasmuch, some lodges have asked whether they may keep their officers in their chairs for another year due to the pandemic. Other lodges have not. The decision to hold over officers must be the will of the lodge. The simplest way to ensure a lodge is governed by the most capable men is to follow points 1 and 2 above.

Chapter 54 of the CODE is clear in the process by which lodges shall hold elections. Regulation 54-1.2 specifically states, "If a lodge fails to elect its officers at the time required, the Grand Master shall, upon application grant a dispensation to the hold an election at a designated stated communication. In the case of inclement weather, the Grand Master may select a date other than a stated communication, excepting Sunday." It is my official opinion that this exception is intended for the health and safety of the brethren of the lodge. Therefore, the Grand Master, at his sole discretion, may issue a dispensation to postpone the Annual Stated Communication for reasons other than inclement weather. As such, it is my opinion, given the circumstances of this year, and this year only, there is some flexibility to the procedures enumerated in Chapter 54.

The failure to hold an election at the time appointed by the bylaws of the lodge is typically irregular. As noted in my recommendations related to the COVID-19 pandemic issued on March 12, 2020, "while our CODE does not permit a lodge to 'cancel' a stated communication (Reg. 45-2) it is permissible for a lodge to not meet due to a lack of quorum (Reg. 45-8) without requiring a dispensation from the Grand Master. Further, while Reg. 45-14 states that the Grand Master 'should arrest the charter of a lodge which has had no meeting for six consecutive months' I will not penalize any lodge that chooses not to meet or could not meet due to lack of a quorum during this time."

However, when the lodge reconvenes at a stated communication for its annual meeting, given the present circumstances, I, as Grand Master, will not reprimand a Master who chooses to not hold an election of officers, so long as he first proposes the following motion:

*"I move to inquire by written ballot of the brethren herein assembled if it is their wish to hold the sitting officers of this lodge at their stations and*

*places. Brethren, if you want an election, vote "Yes." If you do not want an election, vote "No." "*

This vote shall be by written ballot as the CODE forbids election by acclamation (54-1).

The lodge shall proceed to vote "Yes" to hold an election, or "No" to not hold an election.

If the lodge votes "Yes" and chooses to hold an election, it shall do so as described in either points 1 or 2.

If the lodge votes "No" and chooses to not hold an election, the Master shall order the Secretary to immediately make application to the Grand Master for dispensation to hold an election at a future designated stated communication as stated in Chapter 54-1.2, which shall be next annual communication of the lodge in 2021. He shall then inform the Grand Secretary of the lodge's standing officers.

I reiterate, this provision is only effective for the election cycle of 2020, and that no Master, nor lodge shall be penalized for failing to hold their annual election as provided in their bylaws, if they employ this opinion and immediately apply to me for dispensation.

Given under my hand and seal this 2nd day of October, 2020, in Greensboro, North Carolina

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul S. B.", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

P. Shaun Bradshaw  
Grand Master of Masons in North Carolina, 2020