

In Memory of V Wy Bro Thomas Henry Wise PGV PProvG Rec

1st September 1933 ----- 3rd March 2024

Brethren all, these notes on the duties of a Visiting Deacon were compiled by V Wy Bro Tom Wise and reproduced by kind permission of the Northeast province (which no longer exists.) Tom was a Secret Monitor to the core, and he believed, as do your Rulers, that the Visiting Deacons are the essence of our order. The distribution of these guidelines has been accelerated by the variable diligence with which these duties are discharged throughout our Province. The Provincial Grand Supreme Ruler and his executive hope these notes will stimulate you all to fulfil those duties more conscientiously.

These notes are addressed to the Visiting Deacons and are intended to help them fulfil their obligations in their conclaves and to understand their special and important place in the hierarchy of our order. However, there is a mutual obligation between the visiting deacon and his charges, and all brethren should take note of the following advice. These notes are not intended to overrule the custom and practice of any conclave, but in **every** case, apologies should be tendered through the Visiting Deacons and not the secretary.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The full title of our order is "The Order of The Secret Monitor, or Brotherhood of David and Jonathan" The second part of this title is easily understood, the story of the friendship of David and Jonathan is widely known and is an obvious model for an order with friendship as its head. The first part – The Order of the Secret Monitor is rather more obscure. At first view it may well conjure up a picture of a schoolboy giving out pencils whilst no one is watching! There is, in fact, a connection with this fanciful image; the word "Monitor" derives from the Latin word "Monitio", which literally means a warning of danger. The schoolboy monitor's original function was to assist the schoolmaster in keeping order by watching over the class and giving warning of problems as they arose. In the same way, the special feature of our order is the obligation we have undertaken, not merely to aspire to high standards ourselves but to watch over and warn our brethren and to give them guidance and support.

SO, WHAT'S SPECIAL ABOUT VISITING DEACONS?

The Visiting Deacon is in many ways the true Monitor of our order. He has the specific duty – unique in Freemasonry – of watching over the brethren placed in his care and warning his Supreme Ruler and Conclave of any problems they are confronted with. The duties of the Visiting Deacon are set out in rule 72 of the Constitutions and Regulations and in accordance with that rule are also incorporated in the By-Laws of every Conclave. These duties are of course summarised by the Fourth Visiting Deacon at the opening of every meeting, but it is worth mentioning that the duties of the office – as the title suggests - include visiting the sick or aged brethren, and for encouraging other members of the Conclave to follow this example.

COMPILING YOUR REPORT

Clearly your first requirement is a list of the brethren for whom you are responsible. All the Conclaves in the province provide a full list of members' names and addresses with every

summons, the lists identify the Visiting Deacon responsible for each member and in some cases give telephone numbers and e mail contacts.

Some Conclaves do not change the allocation of Visiting Deacons, so that a member allocated to the Third Visiting Deacon on induction will be allocated to the Third Visiting Deacon for as long as he remains a member of that Conclave. Other Conclaves re-allocate annually. If yours is one of these your secretary should provide you with a list of your charges at the installation meeting at which you were appointed. If your summons does not show telephone numbers, you will need to put your own list together. Your secretary or immediate predecessor should be able to help. Having compiled your list, the choice of means of communication is yours, you may visit in person or make contact by letter or telephone. Remember that your first duty is to enquire about the welfare of your charges **not** simply to establish whether they will be attending the next meeting.

You should aim to make contact around two weeks before each meeting so that if one of your charges is ill, there is time to visit him. You should advise the Supreme Ruler in advance of the meeting and take any other action which may be appropriate. Some Conclaves have very large time lags between meetings (for instance, an October meeting and the next not till March the following year). Remember that Visiting Deacons are responsible for their charges all year round, and it is advisable to maintain contact with your charges even if no meeting is scheduled for the near future.

If a brother will not be able to attend the forthcoming meeting, try to establish the reason in some detail so that you can report accordingly. Further suggestions are given below.

The responsibility for compiling a report remains with you, even if you will be absent from the Conclave meeting. In such circumstances, the completed report, in writing, should be sent to the Secretary at least a week before the meeting so that a substitute can be delegated to present your report and to perform your ritualistic duties.

GIVING YOUR REPORT

Your aim must be to inform the Conclave of the precise reason for a brother's absence. In this order, the words "**Apology Supreme Ruler**" are **never** acceptable.

Absences can be grouped into three broad categories: illness, non-masonic obligations, and other masonic commitments; these are considered in turn below.

If a brother is ill, you should report the nature of his illness, avoid giving personal or detailed descriptions of his present condition and progress, and, where appropriate, the likely period of incapacity. There is a wide range of possibilities, but you should aim to give as much information as possible, particularly in circumstances where visitors would be welcome.

No masonic commitments may include the death or illness of a relative, or a domestic disaster such as the collapse of a ceiling. In most cases absence from the Conclave will be attributable to work or holidays.

Again, your objective is to inform the brethren, and you should provide as much detail as possible. "Working" is not an adequate report. "Brother Jim is working shifts and has been unable to

arrange an exchange, so he will not finish work until 10.00pm. This explains the position better and assures the brethren that the reason is genuine. Similarly, where possible, it is better to say that "Brother Jack is sunning himself in Tunisia until next Tuesday" than simply say he is on holiday.

The third category, other Masonic commitments, particularly demands a detailed report. Sometimes such absences are unavoidable, but this is not always the case. A brother may be appointed to higher office in another order and, consequently, have ceremonial duties not foreseen when he accepted office in the conclave. That is very different from the case of a brother who chooses to go elsewhere. Once again, the objective is to inform the brethren so they may judge whether the reason given is acceptable. You should, therefore, try to establish what other commitment is being given priority over the conclave meeting, and you should report accordingly.

AND FINALLY

Like most things in Freemasonry, the more you put into performing your duties the more satisfaction you will derive from your office.