



# Chaplain

Brother ....., you have been elected (or appointed) Chaplain of this Lodge, and I have much pleasure in investing you with the jewel of your office. It will be your duty to lead the devotional exercises of the Lodge which should be practiced in that spirit of universal tolerance which distinguishes our institution. The doctrines of morality and virtue will form the appropriate lessons you are expected to communicate to the Brethren of your Lodge, and I trust you will discharge the duties of the office with steadfastness and perseverance in well doing

Installation, Canadian Work, Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon

“... to lead the devotional exercises of the lodge....”

As Chaplain you represent spiritual light. Your duties, though important, are not extensive, and contribute to the dignity of our ceremonies. You should cultivate a good delivery, speaking up clearly, and giving expression to our prayers. Care should be taken that all prayer is non-denominational. You may, on occasion, be very helpful to the lodge if you are familiar with the funeral service, although it is not necessary for you to commit it all to memory. In many lodges the Chaplain's duty includes the opening and closing of the V.o..S.L. Being one of the officers of the lodge, your attendance at all communications is important.

Lodge Officers Guide, Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon

## Another Opinion

In most Masonic jurisdictions, each lodge will have a 'Chaplain'. The principal duty of the Chaplain is to lead prayer before and after the lodge meeting, and to say grace while the lodge is at dinner. . The Chaplain of a Masonic Lodge is an appointed officer of the Lodge. The Chaplain is the spiritual leader of the Lodge. While he may or may not be a real-world Minister, Priest, Rabbi, or Imam,... in the lodge, the Chaplain is responsible for non-denominational prayers at both the opening and closing of meetings, during degree ritual ceremonies, and before meals. Most Chaplains have no religious training and prayers are non-denominational.

His Jewel of office is an open book, symbolizing the Volume of Sacred Law (the Christian Bible, Hebrew Torah or Tanach, the Muslim Qur'an, the Hindu Vedas, or other Holy Books).

## chaplain

[ 'CHaplən]

NOUN

1. a member of the clergy attached to a private chapel, institution, ship, branch of the armed forces, etc..  
"a prison chaplain"



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Jewel of the Chaplain

## Historical

In the earliest beginnings of operative lodges some of the best educated brothers at the time were the Priests or Chaplains of the lodges who helped establish the moral and ethical framework of our craft. This excerpt from the following article illustrates the contributions made.

Our pioneer Masonic author was an unknown parish priest who, sometime in the fourteenth century, compiled what is now known as *The Regius Poem*, a series of Articles and Points of ethical advice for Operative Masons and their apprentices. From this grew a quantity of *Old Charges*, of which nearly one hundred have been found, whose writers modeled their productions on the Regius, with varying additions according to the beliefs of their times. A learned German, Dr. Seegemann, divided these Manuscript Constitutions (for that is how they

were used between 1350 and 1700) into Families in an attempt to account for their origins and his arrangement is still widely accepted. When Operative Masonry became merged in our

present Speculative Order, through the establishment of our first Grand Lodge in 1717, the work of “digesting the Old Charges ” into a new constitution was given to a Scotch clergyman, the Rev James Anderson who had been chaplain in an Operative Lodge and the first edition of his work was authorized by Grand Lodge in 1723. Although it saw five more editions with considerable revisions , the last being published in 1784, his original ‘Six Charges of a Freemason’ are still the groundwork of English Freemasonry and appear in all copies of our various Grand Lodge’ Constitutions Anderson had as a collaborator in his work another clergyman. Rev John Desaguliers, a Huguenot refugee, It is due to their extraordinary catholic spirit, and their great influence in our earliest Grand Lodge, that our order was freed of former religious sectarianism and built up into a body where men of all religions could meet on a basis of mutual respect and goodwill; which quality is its peculiar privilege to this day.

The Rev. George Oliver of Grimsby produced over twenty volumes between 1823 and 1844. His works remain a mine of valuable information about Brethren and events of his time. Between the Revs Anderson and Oliver there grew up in English Freemasonry, during its first 150 years, what can be called “The Mythical School of Interpretation and History’ but our essential freedom of thought, which makes our Order anathema to dictators in religion and politics.

## **God's Word and Work**

### **The Importance of the Masonic Chaplain**

by **Rev. James M. Keane**

The Masonic Chaplain has existed since the earliest days of Freemasonry, operative Masons building the cathedrals and castles turned to ordained clergy in their devotions to God. Today it is a rare Lodge that enjoys the services of a religious professional, whatever his faith or expertise.

The average Lodge Chaplain is the Masonic brother selected to sit at the Master's left (depending on jurisdiction) to whisper wise counsel on administrative complexities that arise in the course of a communication. While there's nothing fundamentally wrong with this practice, it means that this Brother has a year to learn the rudiments of his office before he is succeeded. The man who is fortunate to serve for several years is the exception rather than the rule. This is unfortunate, for the opportunities to serve are vast and varied. I was appointed as a Chaplain of my Lodge in 1984, and in various Lodges and York Rite bodies, I have enjoyed the privilege ever since.

In the Installation Ceremony we read that the Chaplain's duty is "to perform those solemn services which we should constantly render to our infinite Creator and which, when offered by

one whose profession is 'to point to Heaven and lead the way' may, by refining our souls, strengthening our virtues, and purifying our minds, prepare us for admission into the society of those above, with whom our happiness will be endless and perfect."

Thus, the primary duty of the Chaplain is to bring God's Word to His children and to bring his Brethren to a deep relationship with Him. This is implicit in God's command and commission recounted in the Gospel of Matthew 28:19-20: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...." It is therefore important that the Brother have a working familiarity with the Book of Faith.

For most Freemasons that means the Holy Bible, but the phrase refers to the Book of Faith of the Brethren of the Lodge, be that the Torah, the Bhagavad Gita, the Vedas, the Qur'an, the Zhuangzi, or another. I knew a Lodge so eclectic that they opened three books upon their altar. This is not to say that the Brother must memorize one or more books, but a working familiarity is important if he is to bring forth the Word of God as it is understood by the Brethren of the Lodge. At the very least, he should be able to find the passage he needs.

His position in the Lodge, front and center, emphasizes his availability. He is in the midst of his brethren so they may approach him when they need him. While a Chaplain may encounter those whose religious views do not match and may even be diametrically opposed to his own, he has the advantage of the common ground of Freemasonry which stretches across and sweeps aside all divisions.

His second opportunity to serve his brethren is when he visits the sick. Coordinating with the Master and Secretary, he should know who is named in "sickness and distress" and obtain contact information for them. Not only does he pray for them at the communication, but he is a valuable leader in Masonic outreach. By virtue of his office he should be part of the Visitation Committee. He is therefore in a position to see that no Brother is left unattended in time of need. He should make direct contact with the sick. At such distances where personal presence is impractical, he can reach out by telephone and see that they know that not only is God with them in their trials but that their brethren stand with them as well, ready to assist as needed. When brethren are distant, the Chaplain and the Secretary can see that visits are arranged by the local Lodge and a report returned.

To relieve the distressed is a duty incumbent upon all men, particularly upon Masons, and the Chaplain is the visible personification of the Lodge's care for its brethren. This third aspect of service is also part of the Lodge's outreach.

Help for the distressed is Masonically enumerated in the Entered Apprentice degree, and this serves as a guide for the Chaplain. He should be alert for any opportunity to assist. It is helpful for the Chaplain, together with the Secretary, to know what sources of aid are available. This can range from the Brotherhood Fund to the telephone and on-line 311 systems. Again, expertise is not essential but a sense of where to turn for aid is. It is also important that the Chaplain be discreet as he thereby engages the trust of his Brethren. They must know that not only will he pray with them but that he will keep confidence with them.

The fourth opportunity for the Chaplain to help his brethren is to plan the memorial service of a deceased Brother and to be ready to officiate if necessary.

A Masonic funeral service is often the only time a non-Mason sees us as Brethren. Whether relative or friend, that person is grieving and has the right to expect that the obsequies will be presented with solemnity and proficiency, and there the Chaplain is invaluable. Anyone who has organized a memorial service knows there are a myriad of details to be addressed, from contacting the family, procuring information about the brother's Masonic history, scheduling the service, and spreading the word to assuring that the Lambskin, Acacia, and other essentials are where they need to be. No other Masonic activity occurs so unexpectedly and is so time sensitive. If word is given quickly, there might be as much as 48 hours available, most frequently considerably less, and the details usually fall upon the Master and Secretary.

The Master is usually the one who officiates, though he may delegate this duty to any Mason. If the Lodge is fortunate and local deaths are rare, that night may be the first time the Master has read the service, and he must rapidly absorb it while trying to coordinate the evening. Here is where an experienced and resourceful Chaplain can step in and save the evening.

The fifth opportunity is closely connected with this; it's how the Master, Secretary, and Chaplain, the three most visible officers that evening, interact with the family. Occasionally the brethren who line the Chapel walls are strangers to family and friends, but these three brothers are in the forefront in the capacities of their respective offices. They represent leadership, administration, and the spiritual.

The Secretary is often at the edge of his limit, and an alert and conscientious Chaplain can step in to make certain the widow's pin and card have been received, that the widow is remembered on holidays, and that contact is maintained as far as she may want. Some needs may end with the ceremony, some might be ongoing.

The sixth particularly important opportunity for the Chaplain to help is to counsel his Brothers. The Chaplain is the brother whose office potentially puts him in contact with every member of the Lodge. He is the bridge between brothers and the bringer of divine aid. A Chaplain may be approached by brethren who have many different concerns; family, loved ones, home or work hardship, a burden that plagues the heart, or other problems that can't be predicted. Sometimes a Chaplain can offer actual and immediate aid, sometimes all he can be is a good listener, but God provides the understanding and wisdom to help a Brother. One must listen for and pay attention to that still small voice. In addition to strict discretion, the Chaplain should cultivate a receptive, outreaching demeanor. A Brother should feel that the Chaplain is approachable and interested and sincerely wants to help. The Chaplain may therefore set the brother at ease, and he may, with God's guidance, find the way to provide help.

We now come to the seventh and most commonly seen service of the Chaplain, the invocation and benediction in the Lodge's opening and closing. It is here that the Chaplain most frequently speaks directly to God on behalf of his Brethren when he offers the collect of their individual prayers. Each prayer in the opening and closing is three sentences long. Not only must these three sentences be memorized - (think of the Senior Deacon and his forty-two page Lecture), but

the Chaplain speaks directly to God on his Brothers' behalf and should carry their hearts with their prayers. Each appeal is therefore made reverently. Every Brother should hear and be aware that God is present and listens. The prayer must never be presented in monotone or as though reading a pamphlet any more than it should be read. Diction and inflection are important, and he should pause at each comma and stop at each period. He emphasizes not for God's sake (any who pray already enjoy His full attention) but to carry the Brethren along with the prayer. He must make his Brethren aware that something important is being said to our God, and they should hear and think about it. If it takes nearly a minute, let it; God spent an entire lifetime on each of us.

The same applies equally to prayers presented for "sickness and distress" and for death. There are many excellent prayers published in pocket-size booklet form, arranged by purpose for easy reference. These are the collect of the Brethren's prayers and should be communicated as such.

Now a rarely realized advantage of the Chaplain is that he, in communion with God, speaks directly as a beloved child to his Heavenly Father. The printed words are not sacrosanct, they are there as a non-denominational guide. If the text is misremembered or forgotten, any words spoken to God on behalf of His children are acceptable to Him. No director will ever yell "Cut!" should the Chaplain go off script.

The eighth opportunity has already been touched upon. This is the prayer for the new candidate in the West and the communication of the Holy Scripture in each degree while the new Brother stands in the South. These should be done in such manner as to impress upon him their importance. The wording of the Third Degree scripture is complex and frequently missed if not emphasized and well timed. A Chaplain may not want to be perceived as going over the top, but here he should at least reach the roof. The scriptural text should be familiar in order to guard against the three banes of a Chaplain; worn out pages, the passage obscured by the tools, or fairly rare but most disconcerting of all, when the first word falls on the lower right of the right page.

If he is fortunate enough to belong to a Lodge where the direction of attention after the First Degree obligation is deferred to him, he should make it as compelling and dynamic as befits the moment.

This goes equally to the presentation to the new Brother of his personal Bible. This work, to my mind, should always belong to the Chaplain. I once witnessed an exchange in a Lodge I visited when it came time to make the presentation, and the designated brother was absent. The Master and Wardens were going crazy, almost everyone had been approached, and no one knew this work. The Chaplain was standing by as tensions mounted. Finally, touching his badge of office in gentle reminder, he asked, "Why not ask the one who's most connected to the Bible?" Their response was "The Senior Deacon has had so much work to do tonight we don't want to burden him with any more." Twenty years later I still remember this Chaplain's expression.

The ninth opportunity for service, admittedly rarer than most, is the prayer at meals, commonly called "saying grace" or else prayers at special events. It is then that the aforementioned pocket books of prayers, published under various titles, can be extremely helpful, and all that I said about presentation carries over to this as well.

With such a diverse catalogue of opportunities the Chaplain may well feel daunted, but never fear, he has help: the Grand Chaplain. The Grand Chaplain is appointed not only to perform the aforementioned duties on the Grand Lodge level as well as to do whatever else the Grand Master may ask of him, but he is perfectly situated to train, back up, and counsel the Lodge Chaplains in his district. He should meet with them fairly regularly to assess their needs and assist them in performing their service, and he should also be ready to train them and shore them up as needed. There should never be less than one Grand Chaplain in each Masonic district to assure adequate service. This applies equally to the two branches of Freemasonry, the York and Scottish Rites.

If there are twenty Royal Arch districts, that requires twenty Companions, whether ordained or not, to serve. Ten Cryptic districts, geographically diverse, require ten additional Companions while twenty Knight Templar zones and twenty Scottish Rite Valleys each have their own needs. These men will support, uphold, and train their local counterparts spread over thousands of square miles.

It is reasonable in large jurisdictions to have some one to two hundred Grand Chaplains serving the needs of their Brethren in all portions of Freemasonry.

When next you see your Chaplain, tell him he's doing a good job, prayerfully support him, and offer to help. He has a lot to do.

## **Assignment**

**Do you believe the role of the Chaplain has diminished from the early days of the Operative Lodges to the present day? Does the position have a future in Lodge in light of our quest for diversity?**

## **References**

Masonic writers and writings by Bro. N.W.J. Haydon,

Grand Lodge of British Columbia – Masonic Bulletin November 1998 edition