

October 8, 2020

Grand High Priest's **EDICT 2020 – 4**

To all Companions of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Ohio

Whereas, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, Royal Arch Chapter across the state of Ohio have been restricted from conferring the four capitular degrees since the initial lockdown of businesses and organizations and,

Whereas, the Code of the Grand Chapter requires an annual inspection be conducted for every Royal Arch Chapters and requires each chapter to confer one of the four capitular degrees. In addition, there are many candidates desirous of being initiating or continuing their advancement through the capitular degrees concluding with the Royal Arch Degree and,

Whereas, The Ohio Department of Health had introduced the Ohio Public Health Advisory System using seven data indicators in which to identify the risk level for each county and a corresponding color code to represent that risk level. The system is designed to supplement existing statewide orders. Four color coded levels provide Ohioans with guidance as to the current exposure and spread rate as measured and reported in each county, and,

Whereas, Capitular Masons follow the Laws of our state and community and use this Advisory System to determine the risk level in our respective counties.

Now, Therefore, I, Daniel S. Smith, Grand High Priest of Royal Arch Masons in Ohio, by virtue of the powers in me vested by the Constitution of the Grand Chapter of Ohio, hereby decree that:

In light of the current Covid-19 pandemic, Chapters and Mark Lodges of Ohio, may confer the four capitular degrees on candidates from a lodge recognized by the Grand Lodge of Ohio providing they follow a strict adherence to the policies established by the Grand Chapter Ritual Committee. The Grand Chapter Ritual Committee has constructed a degree convocation policy relating to the reopening of degree work under the Covid-19 pandemic and is detailed in the attached document. All points defined in this policy are established in order to ensure the health, safety and comfort of the candidate, degree team, officers and companions. The use of masks, hand sanitizer, gloves, social distancing and other safety measures set down by the CDC, state and local health professionals must also be strictly adhered to.

Any edicts issued by the Grand Master of Masons of Ohio referencing the Covid-19 pandemic in relationship to meetings and degree conferrals will supersede this edict. In addition, any changes to the current Covid-19 recommendations or mandates issued by the CDC, Federal, State or Local health departments, will also supersede this edict.

Chapters holding allegiance under the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Ohio are permitted to confer the four degrees of a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons if their county rating is **Level 1 or 2, (Yellow, Orange)** following the Ritual Committee policy and guidance recommendations established by the State and the Director of the Ohio Department of Health for each level.

If the county in which the Chapter resides escalates to **Level 3 (Red)**, all degree work must be canceled. All other in-person masonic activities may continue without degree work at the discretion of the High Priest of the Chapter and with approval from the District Deputy Grand High Priest.

All in-person masonic activities are to be cancelled if the county in which your Chapter resides escalates to **Level 4 (Purple)**. These activities include but are not limited to Stated Meetings, Annual Inspections, Ceremonies, Grand High Priest Receptions, York Rite Festivals or Capitular all Degree Day events and Special meetings.

Reminder of the expectations for members of the Grand Chapter Royal Arch Masons of Ohio:

- DO NOT feel obligated to attend Chapters, or any Capitular event, until YOU are comfortable doing so.
- If you have a temperature or do not feel well, please stay home.
- Respect each other's decision pertaining to personal contact whether it be a handshake, elbow bump, fist bump or hug, brotherly love should always prevail.

Now Therefore, I, Daniel S. Smith, Grand High Priest of Royal Arch Masons of Ohio, do declare this edict to be in effect from this date until October 7, 2021 unless amended or rescinded prior.

I Further Direct this edict must be read in its entirety and entered upon the minutes at the next Stated Meeting of every Royal Arch Chapter and Mark Lodge in this Grand Jurisdiction.

Given under my hand and seal of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Mason of Ohio in the city of Columbus Ohio on this Eighth day of October, 2020.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Daniel S. Smith", written in black ink on a light-colored background.

**Guidance for Conferring the Grand Chapter RAM Degrees
Under Current Ohio Health Department Orders and Edict 2020-4 by MEC Daniel S.
Smith on October 8, 2020**

The goal of this guidance is to provide help and advice for the companions that are conferring degrees to maintain the personal nature of the Royal Arch degrees, while providing for the safety of members and candidates during this unusual time.

General Ritual Considerations for the Mark Master, Past Master, Most Excellent Master, and Royal Arch Degrees

Wear masks, clean all surfaces and paraphernalia before and after degrees, maintain distancing except where needed for the degree, and use gloves whenever there is hand contact.

If anyone of the cast, members, or candidates does not feel well, has a fever, or other illness symptoms, they should not be present for the degree.

Inform all candidates that there will be close proximity in parts of the degree where they will come in contact with others. If any candidate is not comfortable, then his degree work should be delayed.

See degree specific guidelines below regarding the opening of a degree of Most Excellent Masters or a Royal Arch degree.

If five or more candidates, then an exemplar may be used and the other candidates will observe from the sidelines (see note regarding the Royal Arch degree).

The candidate should only symbolically kiss the Bible unless he brings his personal Bible.

Based on the current Ohio regulations, this guidance cannot be followed in Counties that are Red or Purple. Counties that are Yellow or Orange can use this guidance if their High Priest is in agreement.

Guidance will be reviewed and updated as warranted based on changes in Ohio Health or CDC guidelines.

Let common sense prevail. If without changing the ritual, distance can be achieved lessening the closeness and contact, then the intimacy of the degree might be preserved as to how it should be performed.

Degree Specific Considerations

Most Excellent Master Degree

During the **Opening/Closing**, spacing of stations and seats can handle most concerns for distancing. Note the following change:

For the Opening of a Lodge of MEM's while social distancing remains in effect, the lodge will not form the circle around Altar. (pages 84 and 85 in 2018 ritual; pages 74 and 75 in 1989 ritual)

R.W.M.: "Brethren, assist me in opening a Lodge of Most Excellent Masters from your stations and places." [This replaces: R.W.M.: BrMar, assmbl.... and the lines which follow before R.W.M. recitation.]

After R.W.M. recites Psalm 23, (top of page 86 in 2018 ritual; page 76 in 1989 ritual) resumes with "Tgr, brn."

Royal Arch Degree

During the **Opening/Closing**, spacing of stations and seats can handle most concerns for distancing. Note the following change:

For the Opening of a Convocation while social distancing remains in effect, the chapter will not form the circle around Altar. (Top of page 127 in 2018 ritual; top of page 123 in 1989 ritual)

H.P.: (***) "The Companions will assist me in opening a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons from their stations and places."

After prayer, skip to Note in the middle of page 128 in 2018 ritual; middle of page 124 in 1989 ritual. Continue with d-g and pnl sn. Following knocks, HP continues with the following line.

H.P.: "The Royal Arch having been symbolically raised and Words communicated, I now declare this chapter of Royal Arch Masons opened."

Note for work in the Royal Arch degree: All candidates are required to pass under the Living Arch. Candidates can be distanced for the prayer that follows. After the prayer, all candidates can be seated and observe from the sidelines except the three proceeding through the degree. All candidates return to the floor for the communication of the Words. Distancing can be used during prayer and following communication of the Words to minimize contact. If candidate is not comfortable with this close contact, then his degree work should be delayed.