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GENERAL GRAND CHAPTER
Order of the Eastern Star
Established November 1876

TO: Worthy Grand Matrons (currently serving)

FROM: Marianne R. Shenefelt *MRS Shenefelt*
Most Worthy Grand Matron

DATE: May 16, 2020

RE: Covid-19 Restrictions - MWGM Guidelines

I am proud of each of you as you negotiate this uncharted territory of a much different year than you anticipated when you started your journey. Thank you for your dedication and service to your Jurisdiction, and our Order.

First, it is essential we continue to follow the CDC health and safety restrictions to protect our members, ourselves and our loved ones from the virus. There have been a growing number of questions relating to returning to Chapter meetings with these restrictions in place in combination with the Ritual and the GGC Red Book. Doing so does present some unusual situations when it comes opening Chapter, Balloting, Initiation, Escorting and Introductions, etc. Attached are my official guidelines for **temporary modifications** for Chapter meetings during these unusual times. These are not permanent modifications. As the CDC restrictions are lifted, we will return to the specific instructions in the Ritual and GGC Red Book.

As always, if you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

attachment: MWGM Guidelines
copy: Henry S. Martin, MWGP
Alma Bane, RWGS
GGC Jurisprudence Committee

Chapter Meetings – Covid-19 Restrictions
MWGM Guidelines – May 2020

The following MWGM guidelines are not permanent. They shall be in effect until local and/or national health officials and governments lift the CDC restrictions relating to the coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, it would be desirable that members would express their confidence and comfort regarding their health and safety to attend a meeting before the decision is made to hold meetings.

- ◆ **It is strongly recommended each member wash their hands immediately after coming into the building to help stop the potential spread of the virus.**
- ◆ **It is highly suggested members wear face masks, maintain social distancing and utilize proper hand sanitizing/washing.**
- ◆ **Members are not to shake hands or give hugs.**
- ◆ Members who are feeling ill must not attend meetings.
- ◆ Members who feel uncomfortable or have concerns for their health and well-being should not attend meetings.
- ◆ Those who are in the high-risk group should not attend meetings until it is considered safe by health experts to do so. Those at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are: people aged 65 years and older; people who live in a nursing home or long-term care facility; people of all ages with underlying medical conditions, particularly if not well controlled including chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma; serious heart conditions; diabetes; chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis; liver disease; and people who are immunocompromised which includes cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications (source: [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus)).

Chapter Room Setup. The following are required for Chapter Room setup:

- Altar in the center of the Chapter Room
- Bible on the Altar
- Pedestals at the Star Point stations with emblems
- Signet
- American Flag

Please assign one or two people to set up the Chapter Room. If possible, it would be helpful to have the room set up in advance. The Flag should be placed in the East when setting up the Chapter to eliminate the exchange between Officers to post it.

Opening Chapter. During this time of unusual circumstances, it shall be acceptable for the Officers to enter the Chapter Room informally and take their stations. In a small Chapter Room, it may be necessary for the Officers to be seated on the sidelines six feet apart, with the exception of the WM and those Officers whose stations are typically six feet from other members in the Chapter.

Seating in the East. The WM and WP chairs shall be six feet apart. In a small Chapter Room, it may be necessary for only the WM to be in the East and the WP to be seated at her left on the sidelines six feet from others.

Seating in the West. The AM and AP chairs shall be six feet apart. In a small Chapter Room, it may be necessary for only the AM to be in the West and the AP to be seated at her left on the sidelines six feet from others.

Chapter Officers. The Chaplain and the Treasurer shall be seated six feet apart. The Marshal shall be seated six feet from the Secretary. The Warder shall be seated six feet from the West, next to the door and not next to the AM. In a small Chapter Room, it may be necessary for these Officers to sit on the sidelines six feet apart, except the Warder who shall be seated by the door six feet from others.

Speaking parts of Officers. If it is necessary for the Officers to be seated in their stations on the sidelines to maintain social distancing, they may stand and give their speaking parts from the sidelines.

Balloting. It is recommended the ballot box be placed on the Altar for balloting. Please ensure members use a hand sanitizer before approaching the Altar to cast their ballot. If the ballot box is passed to each member, please ensure each member uses a hand sanitizer before casting their ballot. During these uncommon times, the AC should present the ballot box by extending it toward the voting member as far as comfortably possible to maintain social distancing. Those handling the balloting box and those casting their ballot should protect the safety of all members by using hand sanitizer.

Initiation. The ceremony of Initiation is essential to our Order, followed by being kind and loving to each other, and making our presence known in our communities by our charitable giving. The ceremony of Initiation is a portion of our Ritual where it is not possible to practice physical distancing. It is critical that every possible effort be made to protect the health and safety of our members and the candidate(s). All people involved shall wear face masks, observe proper hand cleanliness and observe all other common-sense precautions to safeguard the health of all. Members shall not become lax in observing social distancing when and where it is possible during the ceremony of Initiation. The Chapter must inform the candidate(s) that their initiation is a ceremony where physical distancing is not possible. It is necessary, as well as right and proper, to explain this to them so they can be given the option of not being initiated at this time. It is recommended the candidate be directly asked if they feel comfortable being initiated knowing social distancing is not possible.

Escorting and Introductions. It is not possible to have extensive introductions and escorting and observe proper social distancing. These activities are not an essential activity of our Order because our existence does not depend on introductions and escorting. Reducing the ways people come in close contact with each other should be the goal for Chapter meetings at this time. Escorting does not meet this criteria. It is acceptable to introduce members from their places in the Chapter Room. It is acceptable to give Grand Honors to those entitled to receive them when they are introduced from their seats in the Chapter Room. At this time, it is not recommended to escort members for introduction.

My Sisters and Brothers, during these unprecedented times, it is of paramount importance that we keep the health and safety of all of our members uppermost in our minds as we cautiously move forward. Thank you for being diligent about protecting them, yourself and your loved ones.

Marianne R. Shenefelt
Most Worthy Grand Matron