

Grand Royal Arch Chapter of the State of Illinois

GUIDELINES FOR VISITING YOUR CHAPTERS

Visiting our Chapters is one of the most important duties of a District Deputy Grand High Priest. Not only do you have an opportunity to truly see how the Chapter is functioning and its overall state of affairs, it gives you the chance to communicate important issues and topics, answer questions, interact with the Companions and see where the Grand Chapter need to focus more attention, whether to provide assistance or support a Chapter that is thriving and growing.

Noted below are some things to be looking for when visiting your Chapters. This list is by no means exhaustive – if you can think of other suggestions to add to this list, please do so.

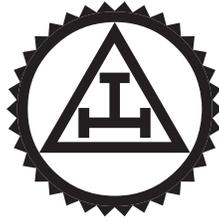
Before your visit

Think about these points before attending a Chapter meeting:

1. Does the Chapter send out due and timely notices about the upcoming meeting? Do they note the time, place and maybe even a program or agenda for the evening?
2. Does the Chapter intend to serve dinner before meeting? Is the time of dinner clearly stated? If it's not at the Temple where the Chapter meets, is the meeting location stated?
3. Does the Chapter send out the minutes of the previous convocation, communications, a summary of new and/or old business or any type of agenda prior to the meeting?
4. How does the Chapter communicate with its members? Email? Call-em-all? Letter via US Postal Service? Personal phone call?

Do you let them know you're coming?

Of course! DDGHPs should certainly announce (even, plan, publish and communicate ahead of time) their visits to their Chapters. Your job is not to surprise their Chapter's members or leaders, but rather to gain knowledge of



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how they are doing, offering assistance and communicating the Grand Chapter's messages and programs on a frequent basis.

Before you get there

Remember, you represent the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of the State of Illinois, some come prepared.

1. Dress appropriately. Wear the "uniform" of the Grand Chapter, as determined and communicated by the current Grand High Priest.
2. Wear your apron, jewel and other awards. Your status is important, so communicate it with the paraphernalia the Grand Chapter has provided. If you've won or attained awards, such as a Ritual Proficiency Jewel, wear that too. It's important stuff.
3. Come early. Get there as early as you can so you can take a look around, talk to people and see how things are going.
4. Know the membership dynamics. Know how many members they have. Know if the bylaws are up to date. Know how many members pay dues. You can get all of this information and more from our Grand Secretary's office and ask him if there is anything else you should be aware of about the Chapter you are going to visit.
5. Have a plan. Sometimes you're just going to see how the Chapter is doing. Other times you may be visiting to announce an upcoming event, give a presentation or support a Grand Chapter program. Whatever your intentions, make sure you have something to talk about.
6. Know what's going on. There's always an event coming up somewhere. Chapter Day, fundraiser, deadline for paperwork or reports. Know them and keep the Chapter updated.



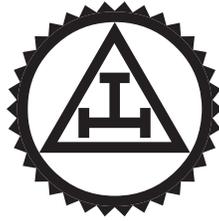
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When you get there

The things you do and look for before the meeting starts can be just as important as how the meeting goes.

1. If the Chapter is serving a meal, go ahead and eat with them. It's a great way to meet the Companions and get an informal sense of how the Chapter is doing.
2. Listen to everything that happens. If there are problems (or even none at all!), take note and ask about them later, if appropriate.
3. Watch everything that happens. Does the High Priest seem prepared? Is there an agenda (and who prepares it)? Do the main officers (High Priest, Treasurer and Secretary) meet ahead of the meeting?
4. Is the Chapter set up for the meeting? Lodge furniture (staff holders, the square alter, etc.) should be put away and the triangular alter, delta, RAC and Veils chairs and swords should all be out. Is the triangular alter in the correct position on the floor? Are the officer's chairs properly placed? Are the officers wearing Officer's Jewels or are they available? Note if the Chapter aprons are used and available.
5. Is there activity around the Secretary's desk? Are petitions be handed in? Are dues being paid? Are people checking on things?
6. Is the High Priest busy? Are people asking advice or giving reports? Are they discussing anything with him?
7. Take a look at the register. How has attendance been the last few months or even years? Do they have special events like degree evenings or days noted with larger attendance? Do they have any special meetings noted? How about the main officers - do the dias officers, Treasurer and Secretary regularly make meetings and sign in? How often do visitors attend and who are they?
8. Where is the Charter located? Is it in the possession of the High Priest? Is it visible in the lodge room? You may be required to know that some time.



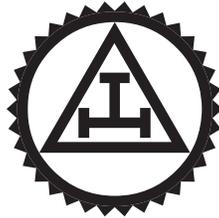
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Getting nosy

If it's suitable, your visit can give you some pretty clear and intimate information about the Chapter. Some of this can border on being a bit overbearing, so use some caution and be sure to justify your intentions.

1. **Check out the condition of the Chapter's furniture.** Are things up to date and looking tidy? A Chapter that lets their furniture get damaged, dirty or otherwise in disrepair may not have a lot of pride, have a lot of money or have a lot of organization. Make note of the overall condition – maybe there's a way the Grand Chapter can help with updated items from a closed or consolidated Chapter.
2. **Take a look at the costumes.** Almost every Chapter has costumes from the early 1900s. But look to see if the Chapter is upgrading or repairing them as needed. It can show a Chapter that is taking pride in conferring degrees and on the rise.
3. **Speaking of degrees, see what their degree props looks like.** Like the furniture, ask the High Priest to show you what they have and its overall condition. Again, a great indicator on their ritual proficiency and the frequency (or lack of it) in getting new members.
4. **Ask the Secretary for minutes from proceeding meetings.** Note if they met consistently. Also if they met concurrently with other York Rite Bodies (something we are trying to discourage). Finally, assess what is in the minutes – are they simply having short meetings with no agenda, communications, planning or programs? Do they talk about events and fundraising? Are they regularly bringing in petitions? Do they plan and attend local Lodges to talk about the Chapter?
5. **Review their financials too.** A well-ran Chapter will have bank or other financial statements on-hand. Same with auditing procedures and reports. If the Chapter – and especially, the Treasurer – becomes evasive, take note and report this later to the Grand Chapter for consideration and possible action. Remember, money makes people nervous. You're not there to take it, but rather to make sure the Chapter has sound financial controls in place.



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6. **Ask the Chapter if you can have a copy of their budget.** Does the budget indicate any plans for activity?
7. **Ask for a copy of their bylaws.** Are they up to date and reflect the requirements of the Grand Chapter's bylaws (minimum charges or fees, meeting requirements, etc.)? Are they living up to their bylaws?

During the meeting

This is an important time of your visit. Keep your ears and eyes open. And whether you are asked to speak or not, always take an opportunity to thank the Companions for having you there, give some feedback on what you've experienced there and find ways to help.

1. **Always try to have the Chapter receive you.** It's good practice for them and something they should naturally be proficient at. That being said, offer to coach them through the process and be very forgiving of any lapses in ritual.
2. **It is NOT up to the DDGHP to decide if he is received.** If he announces a visit he should be received. If it is a "pop-in" visit just to support the Chapter, then he is not required to be received unless the Chapter asks if he wants to be received. When a Chapter asks the question "do you want to be received," the answer should be "yes" every time. As the DDGHP, you are never wrong to always be received but could be wrong in denying to be received. Remember, you are that Chapter's historical record every time you visit so you should be received.
3. **See if there's an agenda, who made it and who leads the meeting.** The High Priest should have an agenda for his meeting, not the Secretary. That doesn't mean the High Priest can't or shouldn't rely on the Secretary to keep the meeting moving quickly and efficiently (at least through business proceedings). But you should definitely get the sense that the High Priest is in control of the Chapter and running it.



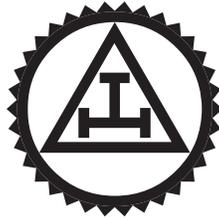
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4. **Watch how the meeting flows.** If this isn't your first visit to this Chapter, do they tend to move quickly through or over petitions, communications and new and old business? A Chapter that habitually has none of these is one that is in trouble. On the other hand, if there's protracted and useless debate, that can be a sign the High Priest is not in control.
5. **Watch the interactions.** Are officers listening and participating in discussions? Do committees regularly report? Are sideliners alert and interested? When it comes to the Treasurer's report (make sure there's a report!), do people pay attention and ask questions? Same with committee reports and talks about events or upcoming plans.
6. **Are Grand Chapter Communications being read?** We always have them, so make sure the Secretary addresses them. Even better if there's discussion about them.
7. **Other Bodies.** If the Chapter had other Bodies open concurrently with it (strongly discouraged, by the way), do those other Bodies tend to dominate the proceedings? We're talking mainly about Commandery here and it happens a lot around Inspection time. Just take note and report back later.
8. **Taking notes.** It's OK to take notes during the meeting - they'll help you remember things later, especially when you are reporting back on your visit. Paper and pencil should be brought.
9. **Is there a sense of hope?** Does the Chapter seem to be going anywhere? If you were the High Priest, would you be especially proud of how the meeting went and how the year is going for the Chapter? What would you do differently?

When it's your time to talk

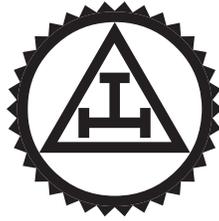
Ideally, you've asked to say a few words at the end of the meeting, just before closing. This has given you time to observe how the Chapter is doing, what they are talking about or planning (or the lack thereof) and what you can say, either as feedback, to praise their efforts and successes or to help get them back on track.



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1. **Thank them for letting you be there.** Even if it's a "pop-in" visit, put the Companions at ease by being grateful. You're there to help them, after all. Even if things seem hopeless.
2. **Find something to praise them for.** Maybe their opening ritual was pretty good. Maybe they had a decent turnout. Maybe they have plans and are actually growing. Maybe the chili was pretty good. Find something that you can say some good words about.
3. **Find room for improvement.** You're there to help them – offer it. Perhaps they need some direction on simple opening or closing. Perhaps they'd like to perfect some degree ritual. Perhaps they need assistance planning events, fundraising or just getting their Chapter back on track.
4. **Give an assessment of the Chapter.** Be kind, but frank. If it's bad, they know it. If it's great, they deserve to hear that too. Don't pick apart how the meeting went, but rather speak in generalities, seeking opportunities and letting them know there are other Chapters just like them.
5. **Respectfully remind them their meeting is a scheduled Chapter meeting.** Events surrounding Inspection Practice for the Commandery can be held another time. No need for discussion of these events during a Chapter meeting.
6. **Make it clear the Grand Chapter is there to help them.** Getting out and visiting Chapters, communicating with them and offering help is something we need to do more of. Make a commitment to the Chapter, even if you're there to take their Charter.
7. **Communicate Grand Chapter news, programs and initiatives.** Talk about what's happened recently, what's coming up and what they need to know. Encourage questions and discussions. Now is the time to present and tackle the big issues in a one-on-one setting.
8. **Stay on topic.** This isn't the time to bash the other York Rite Bodies, the Grand Lodge, the Scottish Rite or anyone in particular. Be direct, but be mindful that we are all volunteers in this organization and that no one is perfect.



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9. **Ask for questions – and anticipate some too.** Sometimes a Chapter will come alive on certain topics (i.e. per capita increases). Sometimes just one Companion will lead the questions. Other times, no one asks anything and you might question why you are there. Answer questions honestly and directly. If you don't know the answer, say you'll find out (do it and then get back to them – as you promised). If no one asks anything, then tell them some questions other Chapters have asked.
10. **Try to give them some hope.** Most of these Companions haven't had a lot of interaction with our Grand Chapter. Now is your time to convey that we have a plan and dedicated officers up and down the Line who are there to help them. They need to hear this. Be positive.
11. **Thank them again.** You want them leaving with a good taste in their mouth about your visit and the Grand Chapter in general.

When you're leaving

This is an important time. You've seen how the Chapter is functioning – good or bad – and there's always some follow up to be done.

1. **Thank the High Priest for his hospitality.** It's important that he knows he's in control and has your gratitude. If you've promised him anything or think you or the Grand Chapter can help him, offer him resources or assist in any way, state that you – or someone else – will be in contact with him and when.
2. **Check in with the Secretary.** Doubtless, your visit has resulted in more work for the Secretary. Whether it's getting records or information to the Grand Secretary, something the High Priest will need or some missing information or update, the Chapter's Secretary will likely have more to do now (or, at least, at the next meeting). Assure the Secretary that you and the Grand Chapter are there to help him – it will go a long way.



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3. **Thank the Companions, individually.** Shake those hands and wish them safe travels. Thank them for having you at their Chapter. Your visit is a big deal – make them feel good about it.

Once you're home

This is a very important step in the visitation process. Once you're safely at home, perhaps the next day or the one thereafter, you have some final duties.

1. **Follow up with the High Priest.** Whether it's a telephone call, letter or email, reach out to the High Priest again thanking him for his hospitality. Reinforce that you will get back to him with anything you promised. And offer your assistance and that of the Grand Chapter should he need it.
2. **Keep those promises.** If the Chapter needs something, maybe from an individual Companion, the Grand Secretary or the Grand Chapter in general, make the call, email or whatever to get the ball rolling. If you promise it, either personally or on behalf of the Grand Chapter, make it happen.
3. **Check in with the Chapter's Secretary.** Give him any updates, if you have them. Answer any of his questions – he's bound to have some now.
4. **Make a report to the Deputy Grand High Priest.** We want to know how your visit was. Be as detailed as your determine is suitable, but the more information we all have, the better we can help our Chapters. If you only have time for a quick check-in, hold off until you can compose your thoughts and get any answers you may need.
5. **A plan of action.** If needed, communicate a plan of action or follow-up to anyone who needs it: The Chapter's High Priest or other officers, the Chapter in general, the Grand Chapter Officers or some other Companion who can help the Chapter.