



Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Queensland

TRAINING MODULE TM-RA-06

FESTIVE BOARD PROTOCOL AND PROCEDURE

- References:**
- A. RA Degree Ritual published 2001, p189.
 - B. Duties and Responsibilities of Grand Chapter Officers.
 - C. Grand Director of Ceremonies Manual pp11/13
 - D. Director of Ceremonies Manual Rev Nov 2003, Part 7 and 8, pp29/32.
 - E. DGIW Handbook pp25, 38 and 40.

AIM.

To provide advice for the timely and good conduct of Festive Boards including Installation Banquets.

- Notes:**
- 1. All Companions should be in possession of the current Ritual.
 - 2. All Companions who are involved in the planning, preparation and conduct of Festive Boards are to be familiar with the requirements set out in the references.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Little has been written about the origins of the Festive Board as we know it today. If we accept that Masonry has its origins in the Craft Guilds of the Middle Ages and that these Craftsmen not only worked together but also relaxed together at their favourite Inn or Tavern, then it seems to follow that having some form of “festive” relaxation after a Masonic meeting also stemmed from these gatherings.

The title “Festive Board” implies eating away from home in a joyous atmosphere. It is important that we not forget to place an accent on the happiness and relaxation that must derive from such a joyous occasion.

The evolution of the conduct of Festive Boards has seen many changes. Some changes may have been for the better, and some not. The keg in the corner and its associated implication to “drink up” has been replaced by a more sober attitude perhaps prompted by the rule of 0.05. The impromptu lively entertainment that flowed perhaps from an induced relaxed atmosphere seems also to have disappeared. Should it not be revived – and by what means?

INTRODUCTION

The term, “Festive Board”, encompasses any social gathering following a Masonic meeting, from a relatively informal gathering that could follow any regular meeting to the more stylized and formal “banquet” following an installation ceremony. In all cases the basic rules apply:

- There must be little delay between the end of the meeting and the commencement of the Festive Board. Arrangements must be made for the putting away of furniture and regalia etc, that it does not delay the start of the Festive Board.
- In the same vein, the setting up and cleaning up of the Festive Board must be well managed and not left to the diligent few. The days of a Janitor and many Stewards are gone, alternative arrangements must be planned.
- You the hosts are well known to each other. This may not be so for your visitors and guests. They should be warmly received and treated as if guests in your home.
- The Festive Board must be well planned and well conducted, with light hearted dignity.
- The informal setting lends itself to good socializing or ‘networking’. There will be occasions when a formal setting is more appropriate.
- Lengthy speeches for toasts and their responses must be avoided.
- Entertainment, including raffles, must be well presented and not time consuming. Singing (singly and collectively), recitations and story telling should be encouraged. **Avoid the risqué.** If there’s a doubt, leave it out.

- Some of your visitors, and even some of your own members may travel long distances to be present. This is particular so in the case of a Grand Chapter delegation. Aim to have the formal part of the festive board completed in good time to allow for those who have far to travel. Remember it is not axiomatic to leave as soon as the Tyler's Toast has been honoured.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

As in most things, good planning and preparation often results in good performance. Consider:

- **Management.** Who is in control for planning, preparation and conduct. This is normally the province of J, with input from the DC (Master of Ceremonies) and SE who prepares the toast list for the Notice Paper.
- **Timing.** In all well managed Chapters, an efficiently conducted ceremonial should not exceed two and a quarter hours. The transition from ceremonial meeting to Festive Board should not take more than fifteen minutes. A well planned and conducted Festive Board should not exceed one and a half hours. A total elapsed time of four hours. As a rule of thumb it is suggested that the aim should be to honour the Tyler's Toast at about 10.30 p.m. **BUT NO LATER** than 11.00 p.m. If a Chapter envisages a major departure from these timings, then thought must be given to adjusting the time of commencement appropriately.
- **Responsibility.** Who is in charge. Z of course, regardless of the work performed, who should delegate that responsibility. It is not uncommon for J assisted by the Stewards to co-ordinate the provision of refreshments, Chapter DC to be in charge of the setting up, breaking down and general conduct, and J, the care of visitors and organizing entertainment. However, this is a matter for the Chapter to decide and implement. Those responsible for its conduct must ensure the Festive Board is well managed and with due regard to time.
- **Setting Up.** Is it to be formal or informal. Who is to set up and when and who is to put away afterwards.
- **Seating.** It is important that visitors are seated among the host Companions. It is normal for GZ, DGZ or a representative, together with the Grand Principals and the GDC and their ladies to sit at the same table as Z and his co-Principals. Where this is not feasible, GH and GJ and their ladies sit at other, separate tables. This will allow the Companions to act as hosts. It helps considerably if Place Cards are used to indicate where these various Officers are to be seated. Whether a candidate(s) is/are seated with Z is a matter for the Chapter. Experience has shown that it is preferable for them to be seated with their Sponsor(s)/Mentor(s) who can guide and prompt them if necessary, thus reducing the opportunity for embarrassment.
Note: Under no circumstances should Ladies be separated from their partners.
- **Catering.** Who is responsible for providing. How much expenditure is authorized. Who pays and how much. Is there a levy – who collects it. Who cleans up.
- **Festive Board Charge.** Dwindling membership and increasing costs may make it necessary for a Chapter to impose a charge. While this need is acknowledged, a few things should be borne in mind:
 - Ensure invitations include mention of the charge. For a visiting delegation, a notation should be inserted on the green form if necessary. The GDC should be additionally advised on his arrival at the Chapter.
 - When arriving at a decision to charge Grand Chapter Officers, consider:
 - Grand Chapter Officers are often called to be part of up to three delegations per week.
 - They travel up to 200 Km each way at their own expense.
 - When the distance exceeds this, the recoupment is limited to fuel costs for one car only and overnight accommodation for two twin rooms.
 - If ladies are included, the additional expense is met by their partners.
 - Protocol suggests that the GZ, DGZ or the GZ Representative and the GDC should be excluded from paying the charge.
 - Grand Officers who are not required to pay the charge invariably subscribe an equal amount to the raffle, if held.
- **Raffle.** Who provides the prizes. Who conducts it. Who provides the tickets and what are their cost. When are the tickets to be sold and when are the prizes drawn.
- **Entertainment.** Who, what, when and who co-ordinates.
- **Development.** It may be appropriate to include an item of education or training, where there are only members of the Order present. Consult with the Chapter Development Coordinator.
- **Toasts.** Have a complete and prepared toast list, usually contained as part of the meeting Notice Paper. In some cases this may not be possible, particularly where Companions have been honoured and last minute arrangements have to be made. While there are mandatory toasts that must be honoured, care must be taken to ensure that the Toast List is not overburdened and time consuming. Ensure the proposers are given sufficient time to prepare. Ensure the responders are given sufficient time to prepare their responses. Promote brevity in toasts, speeches and responses. **Grand Committee have approved a new system of Toasts to Grand Chapter to cut back on the proliferation of toasts. This is explained later in this Module.**

CONDUCT

Form

Apart from the formal requirements of an installation banquet, Festive Boards may be conducted in any form acceptable to the Chapter.

Starting

There must be a minimum of delay between the closing of the meeting and the opening of the festive board. The putting away of the meeting's furniture and regalia may be left until later, this however produces its own problems of finding volunteers at the time required. The Chapter DC should ensure Companions move directly and quickly into the Festive Board and take their places. He may be required to exercise tact in separating Z from those who would want to offer their congratulations. Where a Grand Chapter delegation has been received, the GDC can be called on to assist in the seating arrangements.

National Anthem

The singing of the National Anthem at the start is recommended. If it featured in the opening of the Chapter it is not then necessary. However, it must be realized that under the latter circumstances some visitors and the ladies will be excluded from taking part in this expression of national pride. If the event is held in a public place, such as a restaurant, it may be necessary to seek the permission of the restaurateur and, even then, may not be practicable, particularly if the other patrons have looked well at the drinks list.

Opening Grace

It is not good manners to take refreshments before the Opening Grace. **Another reason for a prompt start.** It is normally delivered by the CHAP (or J). The normal words are, "For what we are about to receive, may T.T.A.L.G.M.H. make us truly thankful (and ever mindful of the needs of others)". The part in brackets is shown as a manifestation of the charity and relief practiced by Freemasons. If grace is to be said by a Minister of Religion, he may substitute with that which he normally uses.

Toasts

As stated previously, toasts and their responses should be brief but consistent with their aim. They must be heard in strict silence as a matter of courtesy. The DC should ensure all participants have timely notice. Traditionally, the first or loyal toast used to be proposed after the main course had been completed. This does not now necessarily apply. The first toast should be timed so that subsequent toasts, introduced at the direction of Z, or at the discretion of and usually by the DC, are completed in a timely manner. There should not be any undue delay between toasts and their responses. This is a matter of judgment.

There is a trend to replace some oral toasts with the 'European concept' of 'taking wine with...'. This is less time consuming and is encouraged except for the mandatory toasts.

The introduction of a toast and the response follows established procedure as shown below. The wording is derived from long established procedures and protocols. Some variations may be made to suit local conditions.

Introduction By the DC. A suggested form of words is "Companions, Ladies etc, please rise (if appropriate) and give your attention to (Rank and Surname or Chapter Office)..... while he proposes (here indicate the toast to be proposed), or, while he responds to that toast".

Proposition

The proposer rises and says, except for the Loyal Toast:

Excellent First Principal,
Most Excellent First Grand Principal *if present*,
Right Excellent Deputy First Grand Principal *if present*, or
Right Excellent Companion (*surname*) representing the Most
Excellent First Grand Principal,
Most Excellent Companion (*surname*) of Past First Grand
Principals present,
Companions,
Ladies and Visitors", followed by the proposition of the toast, or
response.

Note: The naming of Ladies before Companions is contrary to the strict requirements of protocol, but, if so used, should not be the cause of debate.

Reception

All respond by repeating the proposition and drinking the toast.

Conclusion

DC requests all to be seated.

Response Introduced by the DC as shown above.
Responder opens his response in a manner similar to the proposition shown above.
Thanks the proposer “for the proposition of the toast and you Companions for your reception of it”. Replies appropriately and briefly.

Acknowledgement Called for by the DC. Each response should be applauded. This may take the form of the traditional, ‘on the fourth coming down’. However, when ladies and other visitors are present, this form of response is alien to them and should be replaced by acclamation. This should be made clear by the DC at an appropriate time in the ceremony.

The Toast List

The Queen. Mandatory. The first toast, sometimes referred to as, “the first loyal toast”. Always proposed by Z with a simple announcement, “Companions and Ladies – The Queen”. ALL rise. The first verse of the Royal Anthem may be sung at this point at the discretion of the Chapter. It has more impact if there is an organist (pianist) available. The reception is “The Queen”, there is no need for any other embellishments. There is, of course, no response.

The Most Excellent First Grand Principal and The Order. Mandatory. The second toast, sometimes referred to as, “the second loyal toast”. **Grand Committee have ruled that this shall be the only toast to Grand Chapter. The toast will be received by GZ if present, or DGZ if present, or by the Representative of GZ.** Announced by the DC who requests ALL Companions to rise, and invites ladies to rise if they wish, at the appropriate time. Always proposed by Z with a few brief and appropriate remarks addressed to the recipient of the toast. The recipient of the toast will respond and may appoint a suitable Grand Chapter Officer to support him. This will give the opportunity of placing items of interest emanating from Grand Chapter before the Companions.

Grand Chapter Response

This section is included to give guidance to a Grand Chapter Officer joining in a response to the toast. After the usual introduction in response, the following items should be covered:

- Thank the leader of the Grand Chapter Delegation for the honour given to respond.
- Thank Z and the Chapter Companions for their hospitality.
- Congratulate those installed/invested or the candidate(s). (Note there may be a separate toast).
- Congratulate newly honoured Companion(s), if appropriate.
- Offer some nice remarks about the ladies, if present. (Note there may be a separate toast).
- Sell any Grand Chapter initiative/event. Grand Convocations etc.
- Sell the idea of becoming an active Grand Chapter Officer.
- Thank the leader of the Grand Chapter Delegation for being included in his delegation.

Newly Installed Principals and Their Officers. This is normally proposed by the IPZ who may offer a few congratulatory and encouraging remarks. The ‘new team’ do not rise for the toast. A roll call of the officers and their attributes is time consuming and should be avoided. The response is given by Z.

The Installing Principal and Officers. This is normally proposed by Z who may offer a few remarks of gratitude. The installing team do not rise for the toast. The response is usually given by the installing Z.

The Candidate(s). This is normally proposed by a suitable Companion such as a Proposer, or a Mentor or some senior Companion within the Chapter/Lodge/Council. It is suggested that Candidate(s) should not be subject to a toast each time they receive a degree (or part of a degree). It is difficult for proposers and candidates to come up with something different to say after each degree, or part of a degree. Chapters should consider toasts when a candidate(s) is Advanced, Exalted, and completes each series of the Appendant Degrees. The candidate(s) do not rise for the toast. In responding to the toast the candidate(s) could be given the opportunity to give a thumb nail sketch of his life and interest and/or his expectations from The Order. There is an opportunity here for furthering his, and others, development by giving a short presentation on the work performed at that meeting, if appropriate.

Newly Honoured Companion(s). This toast, by its very nature, does not appear on the Toast List. The DC must be aware of this and make suitable arrangements for its discharge. If the DC has been honoured, the procedures are in the hands of the GDC. The toast is usually proposed by a senior Companion within the Chapter who has a good knowledge of the Royal Arch careers of the honoured Companion(s) and their other commitments to Freemasonry and their community. Each newly honoured Companion must be given the opportunity to respond. It is an important occasion in their Masonic lives and should be seen to be so. However, they should be discouraged from giving long dissertations on their careers, however proud they may be of them.

The Ladies. This toast, by its very nature, is only proposed when ladies are present at the festive board or installation banquet. However, it can be combined with the Visitors Toast. This is a matter for the Chapter to decide. It is usually given by a senior Companion within the Chapter who has the aptitude to present a few well chosen words to give substance to the proposal. All, except the ladies, and visitors if appropriate, rise to honour the toast. A response is not mandatory but may be made, by the First Principal's lady or some other lady who has had ample warning and who is comfortable to do so.

Our Visitors. Normally proposed by J who should precede it with suitable words about the importance of visiting and perhaps the attributes of regular visitors to the Chapter. It is important to note that Grand Chapter Officers forming the visiting delegation to the Chapter are not regarded as visitors and therefore are required to participate in the toast. It therefore follows that these Grand Chapter Officers should not be called upon to give responses on behalf of the visitors, **unless there are special circumstance. If such circumstances do exist, permission must be first sought from the leader of the Grand Chapter delegation.** J has control of the responses. The order of responding is normally, the DGIW where there is no Grand Chapter involvement, it is then customary to call upon a visiting Z to respond. It is not necessary for each visitor to respond, and under no circumstances should J enquire if any other visitor would like to speak. If a toast to The Ladies has been incorporated, a response by a lady should be considered bearing in mind the appropriate remarks previously recorded above.

Sister Chapters. This toast is usually delegated to a suitable Companion. It celebrates close and reciprocal ties formed with other Chapters which should form the substance of the remarks made. There is usually no response unless a member of one of the sister Chapters is present. The courtesy of making a response should then be given.

Absent Companions. This toast is given in Chapters where the view is that the Janitor's Toast does not give sufficient emphasis to this title. It can be given by a suitable Companion, perhaps the Almoner, however, in some Chapters the Almoner responds to the toast with a brief summary about the Companions who are absent, particularly where health or necessitous circumstance is involved.

Janitor's Toast. Usually proposed by the JAN, or some Companion who can deliver the words with sincerity and without prompting. The reception is, "Till we meet again". There is no response.

The Celebratory Cake

If there is a celebratory cake, it should be displayed in front of Z, with an appropriate cutting implement (a ceremonial sword is ideal for this purpose), from the commencement of the installation banquet. At the appropriate time the DC announces the 'cutting of the cake', all present should rise and applaud by acclamation as the cake is cut by Z and his lady, if present. Time should be allowed for the taking of photographs. It is a matter for the Chapter when the cake is ceremonially cut. It is usual for this to occur either immediately after the toast to The Newly Installed Principals is completed or immediately after the toast to The Ladies is completed, but in sufficient time to allow for the cake to be taken to the kitchen, sliced and the slices distributed to those present.

Raffle

If a raffle is to be held, it is suggested the prizes be suitably displayed, an announcement made by the DC early in the proceedings announcing the raffle and the cost of the raffle tickets, ticket sellers be appointed and instructed not to disrupt the proceedings while selling tickets and the draw take place at a suitable time and without delay. It is suggested tickets be sold from the conclusion of the toasts involving Grand Chapter with an appointed cut off time to allow the ticket stubs to be processed to give sufficient time for the draw.

It is not uncommon for the draw to take place in two or more parts, dependant on the number of prizes. Those officiating in the raffle must ensure it progresses speedily and does not delay the other proceedings.

Entertainment

Entertainment should certainly have a place at our festive boards and be encouraged. Like everything else associated with the meeting it must be carefully selected, integrated within the whole framework of the program and well presented. Contributing artists should be given a specific time frame for their particular input. Perhaps some Companion could be appointed to co-ordinate items of interest such as: singing, recitation and brief talks or resumes of recent trips and experiences. The scope is limited only by one's imagination.

Development

When appropriate, that is, when only Royal Arch Freemasons are present, a short item on development could be delivered. It could be relevant to the degree worked for a candidate, a part of a planned development program for the Chapter, a 'Trivial Pursuit' or a presentation featuring the wider family of Freemasonry. Again, the scope is only limited by one's imagination.

CONCLUSION

A well run and successfully presented festive board should send your Companions and your visitors away with a contented feeling of having taken part in a memorable occasion. This should promote a desire to return.

To make your festive board attractive you will have to work hard at it. It will not just happen.

Much has been written above about time. Good time management is most crucial to your success. People do not want to sit through (endure) long boring speeches. This aspect can, and should, be addressed at rehearsals and practices. Neither do they want to be unduly delayed by ill conceived notions and poor program management. You may be home and safely tucked up in bed within the hour whereas some of your visitors may be on the road for a further hour or more.

There exists an accepted protocol for the retirement of the Grand Chapter Delegation **BEFORE** the conclusion of the Festive Board i.e. 'The Janitor's Toast'. This is solely at the discretion of the leader of the Grand Chapter Delegation. It has been rarely invoked in the past. This does not mean it won't be used in the future – particularly where the evening 'drags on beyond acceptable limits'.