

LODGE/CHAPTER CLOSURE PROCEDURE

Outline of the Process

Background

The Provincial Grand Lodge of East Lancashire has continued to stress that East Lancashire, whilst having a comparable number of individual Masons to several other Provinces, has a vastly greater number of Lodges; many of which are experiencing difficulties due to declining membership.

A measure of re-organisation has over the last number of years become necessary.

This leads to a knock-on effect with Chapters who are also experiencing similar difficulties with recruitment and retention.

In 2000 there were some 406 Lodges and 140 Chapters in East Lancashire, when the first of the struggling Lodges decided to close their doors; the Province having already tried, with little success to implant 'survival strategies'.

Since then over 170 Lodges and 30 Chapters have returned their Warrants/Charters to UGLE/SGC, either through closing completely or amalgamating with another Lodge/Chapter.

The RW Provincial Grand Master/ME Grand Superintendent has confirmed that he is prepared to accept the return of a Lodge Warrant/Chapter Charter to UGLE/SGC or the amalgamation of Lodges or Chapters if the members see this as the only way forward. The RW Provincial Grand Master/ME Grand Superintendent has said that at all times if a Lodge/Chapter is contemplating such action the Lodge Secretary/Chapter Scribe E must contact the Area Assistant Provincial Grand Master/Assistant to the Provincial Grand Principals before any action is taken. He will then arrange either to visit the Lodge/Chapter himself or organise an appointed Co-ordinator to visit.

Please note the following:-

1. The RW Provincial Grand Master/ME Grand Superintendent will not accept returned Warrants/Charters without the agreed process having been followed.
2. That there is no "short cut" in the system which over-rides the procedure. The speed of the progression of the request to close is entirely dependent upon the speed and accuracy of the written information supplied by the Lodge/Chapter concerned. You should ensure that your Lodge/Chapter follows these requirements.
3. When a Lodge, to which a Chapter is attached, decides to close, its Secretary must inform the Chapter accordingly. Thereafter the Chapter, should, after discussing its own future, maintain careful liaison with both its former and prospective Lodges, with advice being sought from the APGP at all stages.
4. Note that it is now possible for a Chapter to 'Stand Alone' without attachment to a Craft Lodge.
5. It is hoped that no member of a Lodge/Chapter that surrenders its Warrant/Charter is lost to Craft or Royal Arch. It is hoped that he will join another Lodge/Chapter, either individually, or as a small group to retain friendships previously forged.

Procedure

Once a closure has been agreed as the only viable action, an approved process needs to be followed in order for the Lodge/Chapter to be closed with dignity and honour. It is regretted that there have been occasions where Lodges/Chapters have chosen to ignore this advice, which has considerably lengthened the procedure in those instances.

The first stage is informal discussions as to whether a closure is necessary. This should be attended by every member, if possible, and Chaired by the APGM/APGP, District Chairman/DORA or Co-ordinator who will set out the course of actions to be taken and give the members a clear idea of the work and possible timescale involved. Notes should be made of these discussions and circulated to all the members so that they are kept informed and given the opportunity to comment. The APGM/APGP, or his representative, will keep the Provincial Grand Secretary/Scribe E informed.

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Procedure (cont.)

The Lodge/Chapter members should then be given a period of time for reflection and discussion amongst themselves before a second, more formal meeting is called, again chaired by APGM/APGP District Chairman/DORA or the Co-ordinator. Members will make known their decisions, minutes taken and circulated to:-

- a] all the members of the Lodge/Chapter,
- b] the Assistant Provincial Grand Master/ Assistant to the Provincial Grand Principals, District Chairman/DORA

Such minutes should clearly embody all resolutions taken and be approved and signed by the Worshipful Master/First Principal. The APGM/APGP will subsequently discuss the outcome with the Provincial Grand Secretary/Scribe E and, if appropriate, the Lodge/Chapter will be placed on the "AT RISK" register. The RW Provincial Grand Master/ME Grand Superintendent will be informed of the situation.

Note: Depending upon the current situation of the Lodge/Chapter it may be necessary to collapse the two meetings into one. However, to avoid the contention and/or oversights that undue haste may induce, this should be avoided if at all possible.

Planning is essential for a smooth, dignified and honourable closure.

For this to be achieved three meetings are required:-

- Meeting 1 - a Verbal Notice of Motion to close the Lodge/Chapter is given by (preferably) a senior member.
- Meeting 2 - the Notice of Motion is written in full on the Summons and voted on at that meeting.
- Meeting 3 - The Lodge/Chapter closes at a subsequent meeting.

During this period it would be a useful exercise for the Sec/SE to ensure that his records of Minute Books/Attendance Registers/Committee Meeting Books/Declaration Books, and any other record books are brought up to date (if not already part of the Lodge/Chapter Inventory), as all of these are required to be forwarded to UGLE/SGC (as per Rule 191 BoC). This will help to achieve a smooth, dignified and honourable completion of the Closure Procedure.

Once it has been decided that the only way forward is to close the Lodge/Chapter and return the Warrant/Charter to UGLE/SGC a Closure Committee should be formed to ensure that the Closure Procedure is adhered to, and guarantee that the Lodge/Chapter is closed with dignity and honour. The Committee should consist of (at least) WM/1st P; Treasurer; Secretary/Scribe E and a senior member of the Lodge/Chapter. The meetings will be chaired by the Co-ordinator.

Go to the Closure
Procedure Flowchart