

The impact of Covid 19 on Las Palmas-Ponderosa Lodge and Masonry

A couple of weeks ago I had the honor of being the installing officer for the 2022 officers of our Lodge. While I was standing in the East performing my duties, I started to think what it was like when I attended my first Installation of Officers at Las Palmas Lodge. This would have been in early 1968. At that time every chair in the Lodge was filled and folding chairs were placed between the Jr. Warden's pedestal and the altar for overflow. It was a formal event and everybody wore suits and other finery. Masters from Lodges in the area were present as well as the heads of concordant bodies.

While the attendance at our annual Installation of Officers has greatly declined over the 50+ years, what I saw this year was very disturbing. There were one or two Entered Apprentice's present and the rest of us were participants in the installation. Five of our officers who were to be installed were absent. I know one was sick with Covid. Part of the absence of guests was the fact that this was a "closed installation" which meant that only Masons could attend.

I remember attending Lodge in early 2020 and when Josh Harmon wanted to shake my hand, I extended my elbow to bump. We both laughed at the idea of bumping elbows. We all knew that there were a lot of people getting sick from this virus, but we had no idea that would close down our Lodge for over a year and a half. Shortly thereafter, the senior officers would have a monthly conference call on our phones where we were only authorized to pay bills. Later that year we started to have skype Stated Meetings that could not accomplish much more but more brothers could participate. We could not receive applications for membership and obviously could not vote on any applicants for degrees. While we did get some interest in men applying for degrees, there was nothing we could do for them.

We have all heard the expression "If you don't use it, you will lose it." That is what was happening to Masonry all over the state and country. By not having candidates for degrees we lost some good men who would be good Brothers. We also got out of the habit of attending our Lodge on Thursday nights. This would not only be for degrees, but for our Stated Meeting and our Dinner with our Dates. Even today, I have to remind myself that Thursday evening is for attending Lodge, not watching TV.

We eventually opened back up and on July 29, 2021, and passed Brother Daniel Valdez to the degree of Fellowcraft. Just under 25 Brethren, including officers, were present for this 2nd degree. On September 2nd we initiated Gary William Frey. Besides the officers, only three sideliners were present for this 1st degree. On November 11, Benny

Michael Contreras was initiated with a total of 25 officers and members present. On March 24, 2022, Brother Benny was passed to the degree of Fellowcraft with 20 officers and sideliners present. Four of those sideliners were visiting brothers from other Lodges.

In the 40+ years since I was Master, I have come to the conclusion that the most important job of a Blue Lodge is to initiate, pass and raise good men in Masonry. Why would any good man want to join an organization in which there is little to no participation by its members? Without participation from our members, we will soon go from "not using it **to loosing it.**"

Those of you who are candidates, you need to get with your coach on a regular basis. Many coaches will coach you over the telephone due to Covid issues. If you have a problem with your coach, contact our Lodge Secretary and he will help you out. If you are an Entered Apprentice, you should attend all of our Stated Meetings as this is now a privilege which was not available when I took my degrees. All candidates should attend the degrees which they can.

We are very fortunate to have some current officers that are doing a great job with our ritual. Normally we only have one candidate for a degree on any given night. When I took my degrees most nights had 4 or 5 candidates for the first and second degrees. We learned the candidates lecture quickly as we got with our coaches several times a week.

As for our Master Mason members, our Lodge degree meetings give you a chance to converse with other brethren at the free refreshment meal which starts at 6:30. The degrees start at 7:30 and are normally over around 9:00 pm. Much better than the 10:30 to 11:00 when I took my degrees. There are plenty of seats in our Lodge room so if you are concerned with Covid, you can easily comply with the 6 foot distance. Mask wearing is optional. I always wear my mask due to my daughter being on chemo.

If you need a ride to Lodge, contact the Lodge Secretary to see if he can arrange a ride for you. Dress is now casual, not like the suit, white shirt and tie when I took my degrees. Broaden your horizon, make new friends and reacquaint yourself with the lessons of Masonry. Don't worry, you, like I, can miss one or two nights of Jeopardy each month.

Don't let Covid put Las Palmas-Ponderosa Lodge on its casualty list!

I hope to see you in Lodge soon and frequently.