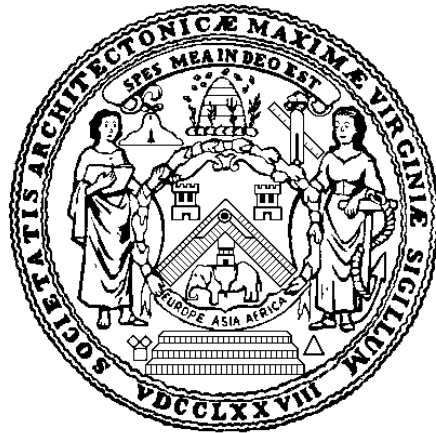


Establishing A Widows Program



Grand Lodge of Virginia

A.F. & A.M.

2007

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Introduction

One of the core values of our Fraternity is to look after our Brethren and their families, and especially the widow of a deceased Brother. But there are cases when the widow loses all contact with the Lodge after her husband dies. Adopting a Widows Program can ensure that the Lodge keeps in touch with and can offer needed assistance to the widows of our departed Brethren.

The seven-step program presented in this booklet will help you begin a program that will honor our obligations to our deceased Brother and provide both moral support, and more tangible support to his widow. The ideas and suggestions below are by no means all-inclusive, and you should feel free to add to them to take into account your experiences and the circumstances of your Lodge.

Setting Up a Widows Program

The Preliminaries

In order to have a viable Widows Program, it is necessary to have someone in charge. Although the Worshipful Master must support and oversee the Program, he does not have the time to run it and should appoint a Brother, perhaps a Past Master or Past District Deputy Grand Master, to take responsibility for establishing and running the Program.

Step One – Maintain the list

The obvious first step, but one often neglected, is to compile a complete list of all the widows whose deceased husbands were members of your Lodge. Divide them into those who still reside in your jurisdiction and those who have moved further away.

Step Two – Reestablish contact with the widows

A. Widows who live locally: If you are beginning a Widows Program and need to reestablish contact with widows whose husbands died some time ago, it is advisable for the Lodge Secretary to write a personal note to each widow expressing the hope that she is well and providing a Lodge point of contact that she can use if she needs assistance.

B. Widows who live some distance from the Lodge: In this case the Lodge Secretary should do two things. First, he should contact the Lodge nearest where the widow resides (if this is in another Grand Jurisdiction, the contact should be through our Grand Secretary) to notify that Lodge of the presence of the Masonic widow and to request them to keep in contact with her and to inform your Lodge if there are issues or problems about which your Lodge should know or could provide some assistance. Second, he should contact the widow to let her know that she can still call upon the Lodge and about the availability of the Lodge near where she lives.

Step Three – Establish contact with a new widow

The Lodge should establish contact with the widow the moment it learns about the Brother's death. The Worshipful Master should call the widow to see if a Masonic service is desired, and if the Lodge can be of any assistance to her. It is customary for the Secretary to draft a Resolution of Respect that the Lodge will send to the widow. *See Appendix one.* At this time, the Secretary should also provide the widow with a Lodge point of contact, in case she needs further assistance. The Secretary should also notify the Grand Secretary so that the Grand Lodge pin and Widows Certificate can be sent to the Lodge for presentation to the widow.

Needs will vary. Some widows will have a large family to turn to for help with the funeral and with other issues in the days immediately following the loss of her husband; but others may not, and would greatly appreciate guidance and assistance from the Lodge.

Once the funeral is over and the relatives have left, there is a tremendous void and a difficult adjustment period. During this period, calls, visits, and moral support from the Lodge can make a big difference.

Step Four – Maintain continuing contact

The appointed Widows Program chairman should enlist a number of the Brethren to call one or two of the widows every day just to check that they are all right.

This is a great job to give to some of the older Brethren who do not get out much any more, particularly at night, and may not be as active as they previously were. They can play an important role in helping the Lodge stay in contact with the widows. All they need to do is make a short call each day, and report to the Worshipful Master or the Widows Program chairman if there is a problem. They also should call the Master or the chairman once a month, so the widows can be remembered to the Lodge at the stated communication, and so appropriate information about the widows can be included in the Lodge's monthly bulletin.

The Brother benefits from having an important task to perform. He now has regular and meaningful contact with the Lodge, and he benefits by becoming friends with the ladies he calls. The Lodge benefits by activating a Mason who would otherwise be uninvolved, and benefits again by having that Brother help the Lodge develop a more effective outreach to its Masonic widows.

Having a particular Brother, or several Brethren, regularly call the widow helps build a relationship between the widow and the Lodge, so if there is a problem, the widow feels comfortable asking for help. Obviously, you will need to adjust the frequency of these contacts to suit the widow. Some may appreciate daily calls, but others would find that objectionable, and be receptive to weekly or biweekly calls.

Step Five – Offer assistance

Once the Widows Program has been established, and you have a Program chairman, a list of widows, and a roster of the Brethren who will maintain regular contact with the widows, you should meet with your line officers or a committee to review what kind of assistance the Lodge is capable of providing. Offering more than you can deliver will only create expectations that you cannot meet, and sour the relationship. On the other hand, there may be many services your Lodge can provide, if you have a plan in place.

Here are some examples of the kind of assistance you may want to consider:

- Doing a survey of minor repairs that the widow needs done around the house, and having the Brethren make those repairs, or arrange for them to be done;
- Typing up a list of the medications the widow takes, the address and phone number of the each doctor she sees, as well as other emergency contacts, so these lists are readily available in case of emergency;
- Shoveling her sidewalk and driveway after a snow storm;
- Helping her with shopping;
- Driving her to medical appointments or to worship services; and,
- Helping provide liaison with social services to address special needs that she may have.

This list is only suggestive of the kinds of help the Lodge may be able to provide. You and your officers will, no doubt, think of many other ways to be of service.

Step Six – Provide assistance

After you have assessed the ability of the Lodge to provide certain types of help, you should assess which widows are likely to need the types of help you can provide. Then you can determine who will perform which service and when. The person who has been delegated the responsibility to keep in regular contact with the widow may be able to help you assess the need and schedule the assistance.

Three additional points:

- In some cases, it may be useful to address assistance to widows on a district-wide basis.
- You will also want to keep the widow informed of the possibility of moving to the Masonic Home of Virginia. The Lodge Secretary, the Lodge Masonic Home Ambassador, or the District Masonic Home Ambassador can be of assistance, but information can also be obtained directly from the Masonic Home by calling 800-262-4644.
- You should send the list of names, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses of your widows to the Masonic Home (email to info@mahova.com; or mail to Masonic Home of Virginia,

Administrative Office, 4101 Nine Mile Road, Richmond, VA 23223-4916). The reason is that the Masonic Home has various types of information that can be of assistance to the widows, and can periodically send the information to your widows.

Step Seven – Maintain a social relationship with the widows

Although maintaining regular telephone contact with the widows and providing needed assistance is the heart of the Program, it is a good idea for the Lodge to maintain a social relationship as well. Your Lodge might:

- Send each widow cards on her birthday and other holidays. This is an inexpensive gesture that is always appreciated.
- Take a widow to dinner on occasion, perhaps on her birthday, or during the holidays. A widow who does not have a large family, or who has outlived her family particularly welcomes this. The holidays can be lonely, and a scheduled outing with one or two of the Brethren is something to which she can look forward.
- Schedule a social visit at her home several times a year. This is an opportunity for several of the Brethren to spend quality time with a widow. And the visit serves as a tangible reminder to the widow that she is still a valued member of our Masonic family. During the visit, the Brethren can

also discretely observe her circumstances and determine how the Lodge might be of assistance. This observation should be done without any outward comment that could wound her pride, but a way should be found to offer assistance and service as may be needed.

- Plan social events to which the Lodge invites the widows. These events can include an invitation to a dinner at the Lodge with some entertainment provided after the meal, an invitation to a Lodge picnic, or an invitation to join members of the Lodge for a fun evening at a dinner theatre or restaurant. Whatever the event, it should be made clear to the widow that she is your guest and there is no charge. In addition, it is appropriate to tell her she can bring a friend. The widow will feel more comfortable and enjoy the evening a great deal more if she has a friend along. Finally, make sure the ladies have transportation to and from the event, and offer to have one of the Brethren provide transportation if that is needed. Additional information to consider in planning your social event for the widows is included at Appendix two.


Conclusion

If your Lodge will implement this seven-step program, the widows of your departed Brethren will feel connected to the Lodge, and you will be able to say with pride that you are meeting your obligation to care for the needs of the widows.

Appendix One: Resolution of Respect

Resolution of Respect

"There are stars that go out in the darkness
But whose silvery light shineth on,
There are roses whose perfume still lingers
When the blossoms are faded and gone."



In memory of

_____ who died _____ 20 _____

"There are hearts full of light and of sweetness
When no longer their life current flows,
Still their goodness lives on with the living
Like the souls of the star and the rose."

Whereas, God hath summoned a member of our Lodge, and the golden gateway to the Eternal City has opened with a welcome to home. His work of ministering to the wants of the afflicted, in shedding light into darkened souls and in bringing joy into the places of misery is completed, and as a reward he has received the plaudit, "well done" from the Supreme Master.

"Their toils are past, their work is done,
And they are fullest blest;
They fought the fight, the victory won,
And entered into rest."

And Whereas, The all-wise and Merciful Master has removed from our midst our beloved and respected brother;

And Whereas, Having held a place of esteem in the hearts of his brethren, therefore, be it

Resolved, That **Henry Lodge No. 57 A. F. & A. M.** of Fairfax, Virginia, in recognition of its loss, and that of his family do tender to them our sincere condolence in their deep affliction and do convey a copy of these resolutions to them as a mark of our respect and esteem.

Worshipful Master

Secretary

Appendix Two: Planning a social event for the widows

- **Leadership:** Select one person to be responsible for the event.
- **Date:** Select a date for the event, leaving plenty of time to work out the details and send out the invitations.
- **Location:** Decide whether the event will be at the Lodge or elsewhere.
- **Menu:** Decide on the menu, keeping in mind any dietary issues.
- **Entertainment:** Unless you are going to a restaurant or a dinner theatre, you will want to consider some entertainment – which can include quiet music during the meal and a program afterwards. Barbershop groups and musical interludes have worked well, but you should consider the age and preferences of your guests.
- **Avoid speeches and long introductions:** It is sufficient to simply introduce the widows and thank them for attending.
- **Invitations:** Send a personal invitation to each widow. Be sure the invitation is clear about the date, the time, the location and driving directions, the dress code, the menu, the planned entertainment, and any other pertinent details.
- **If typed,** be sure the font is large enough to be easily read. If you have good penmanship, it is even more special to send a hand written invitation, but again be sure it is written clearly and is easy to read.
- **Mail invitations** at least one or two months prior to the event. You want to give the widows

plenty of time to plan ahead and avoid scheduling conflicts.

- **Invitation Follow-up:** Call each widow to check that she has received the invitation and to encourage her to attend. Answer any questions she may have.
- **Transportation:** If the widow or her friend do not travel at night or do not have available transportation, arrange for one of the Brethren to drive her and her friend to the event and back home at the end of the evening.
- **Greeters:** Select greeters to meet your honored guests at the door, pin corsages or provide nametags, and offer them a copy of the evening's printed program. Introduce them to others who have arrived. Make them feel at home and help them to socialize.
- **Seating arrangements:** Arrange for the widows to be seated with their friends or with Brethren they know. If the event is at the Lodge, do not crowd seats together and try not to use paper plates or plastic utensils.
- **Event Follow-up:** A day or two after the event, call the widow to ask how she enjoyed the event. See what could have been improved and ask her for suggestions for other events. You may also wish to call those widows who were not able to attend. Tell them about the event and the other widows who attended. Ask them for suggestions for other events.